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Merits and Demerits of Political Systems in Dynastic China



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Beijing, China

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Preface

I have long wished to write a history of political systems in China. For one thing, I consider politics to be an important component of a cultural system. This is particularly true of China, where the cultural spirit emphasizes humanistic values. Confucian scholars, for example, cherished the ambition of self-cultivation, maintaining family order, running the state well, and thereby eventually bringing peace to the whole country. Traditional politics must not be neglected in the study of Chinese traditional culture. Propaganda for the Revolution of 1911 dismissed post-Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) political traditions as “autocratic and dark.” Such disregard of traditional politics has deepened misunderstanding of our traditional culture. If we want to examine Chinese culture fairly and objectively, we should examine its traditional politics. This is the first reason that I wanted to write a history of political systems in China.

Secondly, I believe that any political system must be rooted in a particular country. Even though some systems can be borrowed from other countries, they have to be integrated with local traditions before they can play their due role. Rootless politics or a political system without local complement is never able to survive. In other words, a political system has to be complemented by human matters. Around the Revolution of 1911, everyone talked about reform and everyone talked about revolution. So much emphasis was put on establishing a (new or good) system as though all human matters would transform automatically once such a system was in place. People simply wanted to imitate or copy an existing foreign system and went so far as to destroy human matters to suit a copied system. During the New Culture Movement (1915–1919), there was a loud chorus for democracy combined with scathing denunciations of old traditions and culture. But let us ask: Can democratic politics be installed just at the campaigning of a handful of people disconnected from the cultural traditions of this nation? A system is fixed, while human matters are flexible. A fixed system can never completely suit flexible human matters. Historical experience has shown that no system can be so sound as to have no shortcomings; no system can remain unchanged throughout the times. All the past systems in history have proved to be changeable, so how can the present existing systems turn out to be otherwise? If we just emulate other people’s

systems without paying attention to our own human matters, we will have to follow them whenever their human matters change. How stupid to do such a thing! As a matter of fact, all the systems and traditions in Chinese history, provided they lasted for a century or two, were, without exception, established to suit contemporary human matters. They could not have been established solely to serve the selfish purpose of any one or two persons. How, then, could they be condemned out of hand as autocratic and dark? This is the second reason I wanted to write a history of political systems in China.

However, due to turmoil in the country, an unsettled private life, and more important matters I wanted to write about than such a book, I did not get around to writing it until March or April 1952, when Mr. Ho Ying-chin (1890–1987) asked me to give lectures on the merits and demerits of political systems in dynastic China. The number of lectures was limited to five, with only two hours for each. The pressures of travel and other unfavorable circumstances meant I was not able to give detailed presentations of or precise elaborations on all traditional systems in history. As a result, I selected only five dynasties—Han (206 BC–AD 220), Tang (AD 618–907), Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1616–1911)—and my lectures were only brief accounts. I was injured in an accident after the lecture series and was unable to fulfill my original intention of making up the parts that I had missed in my lectures. Nor, during my convalescence, did I have the energy to improve the lecture notes. I have only corrected parts in the transcribed texts of the original lecture notes that did not correspond to what I meant. It will be most fortunate if, in the future, I can write an exhaustive history of the political systems in China. Still, I feel somewhat relieved to present this book in its current form and take this opportunity to thank Mr. Ho, without whose kind invitation there was little possibility of my completing even this small book. The first manuscript was completed in August 1952 when I was recuperating in Taizhong. I was later invited to write a course book on the “study of political systems in dynastic China.” Pressed by the deadline, I only made minor revisions to the manuscript, such as adding new materials to the two-season taxation system of the Tang and the tax system of the Ming. While the book is a little more substantial than the original lectures, I sincerely hope readers will correct the many oversights and errors that I fear still exist.

Hong Kong
August 1955

Mu Ch'ien

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Introduction

At the kind invitation of your association, I shall present lectures on the political merits and demerits in the past dynasties of China. When it comes to Chinese traditional politics, they changed from one dynasty to another, and it would be wide of the mark to talk about the subject in general. Nor is it possible, because of the limited time available, to discuss each and every dynasty. Since there are five lectures, I shall focus on the Han (206 BC–AD 220), Tang (AD 618–907), Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing (1616–1911) dynasties, with one lecture for each. As the most important of the dynasties, these five can, in general terms, represent the entire course of Chinese history.

Politics should be discussed in two aspects: human matters and systems. Human matters are more changeable than systems, which, though established by people and therefore changeable, are more stable. At the same time, systems also prescribe and restrict human matters. In my lectures, I shall talk more about systems and less about human matters. This is by no means an easy task. In the study of history, systems constitute a specialized discipline. In the first place, to discuss the system of a particular dynasty, one must have a thorough knowledge of human matters of that time. Without reference to human matters, a system, as presented in specific regulations, is too boring and does not deserve much discussion because it is like yesterday's newspaper. Secondly, no regulation ever existed in a vacuum. Various regulations had to complement each other to form a complete system. Unrelated regulations could not have existed or been implemented. Thirdly, although regulations were fixed in writing, they were still changeable along with human matters. No regulation could have come into being out of thin air: It must have had an origin. Any regulation must have evolved from its predecessor through a gradual process. Similarly, no regulation disappeared suddenly overnight. It was bound to develop into something different, foreshadowing a new regulation in the process. Only by discussing regulations in this way can we come to see their actual state; otherwise, regulations become nominal and could not have made any significant impact on history. Fourthly, the establishing and the gradual maturing of a regulation were a process necessarily prompted by various needs in the human domain. There must also have been various intentions behind establishing the new

regulation. Contemporaries may not even have been aware of these needs and intentions, still less future generations. But we can be sure of one point: There must be internal motives as well as external needs for the establishment of a given regulation. Even though things have changed with the passage of time, even though later generations know little and the contemporaries knew not much about what happened, it was not a secret after all. At the time of the regulation and among generations not far into the future, there were those who knew the external needs and internal intentions for initiating that regulation. Some of that knowledge was recorded in history, and this is the material we must pay attention to when discussing a particular regulation. Otherwise, with the times changed and the regulation gone, subjectivity and groundless conclusions of later generations could never match the contemporary needs and real intentions for a certain regulation. Fifthly, no regulation could be absolutely beneficial and defect-free or be totally wrong and without benefit. Gains or losses were decided by actual benefits or defects; benefits or defects should be appraised on the basis of their actual impact at the time. Therefore, before we talk about the merits and demerits of the regulations of a dynasty, we must first know the opinions of relevant parties during their implementation. These are actual evidence and actual views on which to base our appraisal of a certain regulation. I call these historical views, meaning the views of those who personally experienced the implementation of the regulation under discussion. They are more truthful and objective. When later generations, in their own temporal environment and for their own needs, critique regulations that disappeared a long time previously their views can only represent their own time. Their opinions may not be necessarily untruthful, yet we should not rely on them to refute historical views. For example, ours is a time of democratic politics that we should no longer have an Emperor goes without saying. Still, we should not write off history because of the present. We should not think that there should not have been an Emperor in the first place, that no Emperor was any good, and that all political systems in history were bad simply because they were made under an Emperor. This is like an adult dismissing the need to sleep in a cradle simply because he does not sleep in one. But is it not a matter of course for an infant to sleep in a cradle? As for historical views to which I just referred and as far as Chinese history is concerned, the memorials presented to the throne by famous court officials are materials to which we should pay the highest attention. The reason these famous officials won reputations in history and in their own time and the reason their memorials were handed down and kept for so long is that their words were seen, at the time, to represent the views of the time. Only views representing their own time could have become historical views in later ages. We should attach importance to historical views just as we should do with the views of our own time. The essence of historical and present views is the same; the two do not necessarily contradict or conflict with each other. Sixthly, when we discuss a regulation, we should pay attention to its regional as well as temporal position. In other words, we should pay attention to the specificity of different countries. A regulation that can be established in and bring benefits to one country or region may not work in another country or region. Just as it is impossible for a regulation

to last and remain perfect for ever, it is impossible for a regulation to be universally applicable. A regulation has to suit the time and the place. To discuss the political systems in past Chinese dynasties, we should exactly pay attention to the specificity of Chinese history. If we neglect this point, in tune with the current academic trend, and regard everything foreign as good and everything Chinese as worthless, we would be indulging in wishful thinking only, something that does not even count as opinion. How then could we realize the true intentions and actual effects of the political systems in our past dynasties? Seventhly, speaking of historical specificity, we must delve deep into the entire history of culture. Politics is only a part of the entire history of culture. Without a deep understanding of the cultural significance in a country or a nation's entire history, it would be very difficult for us to discuss the significance and effectiveness of politics in isolation.

Given the above seven points, we can see that it is no easy matter to talk about political systems in history. When we do, we also need to set certain limits. I shall start with organization of government, or allocation of power. By learning the evolution of power arrangement in the Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties, we can come to see the general trend of Chinese traditional politics and the intentions behind it. The second aspect is examination and selection. Actually, I should start from here, so we will first know what kind of people were eligible to run the government as prescribed by politics in the past dynasties, how the government was organized, and the distribution of functions and powers. In this way, it would be easier to understand the internal significance of all these. Who should run the government of a country? This is the top concern. Distribution of government functions and powers comes second. Examination and selection regulations in Chinese history were meant to provide a channel between the government and the society so that the latter could understand, participate in, and practice politics. This was the fundamental point in Chinese political systems. As for distribution of government functions and powers, they concern only organizational law of the government, not the basic law for the establishment of the government. Therefore, the scope of the latter should come above the former. However, for the sake of convenience, I reverse the order in my lectures. The third scope concerns taxes and levies, which have to do with regulations on finance and economy of the government. This is also an important part. *Laws and Regulations Since Ancient Times* by Du You (AD 735–812) of the Tang Dynasty, the first book specializing on the topic, includes tax laws in the first part, titled *Land and Finance*, that is the third scope I mentioned above. Its second part has to do with selection of government officials, which is the second scope. The third part of Du's book is about government organizations and their respective powers that is the first scope in my lectures. For the sake of convenience, I first introduce government officials before going on to examination and selection, and then taxes and levies. Concerning taxes and levies, I shall focus on land tax. The fourth aspect is defense and military service. While the economy sustains the government, the military protects it. So this is also of extreme importance. Other regulations, like those on schools and education, are

important, too. But I shall limit my lectures to the above four areas, a prism through which to discuss the evolution of political systems in the past dynasties. I shall compare their merits and demerits purely on the basis of historical facts and analyze their gains and losses in accordance with how contemporaries viewed them. I shall not touch upon topics beyond these four.

Mu Ch'ien

Chapter 1

The Han Dynasty



1.1 Government Organization of the Han Dynasty

1.1.1 *The Imperial Family and the Government*

Strictly speaking, the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220) dynasties were the earliest period when China was ruled under a formal unified government. Before the Qin, the country can only be described as united in feudalism. Not until the Qin and Han was there a central unified government worthy of the name, and the different localities were no longer states ruled by feudal lords. Instead, they were divided into prefectures and counties under the close administration of the central government. Thus, when talking about Chinese traditional politics, we can start right from the Qin and Han dynasties without bothering about their predecessors. Since the Qin was the beginning of Han and Han was roughly the continuation of Qin, I shall focus on Han without talking about Qin.

Now, how exactly was the Han government organized? In order to look at this, it is most important to examine the distribution of government functions and powers. In this respect, I shall only elaborate on two points: one is the division of functions and powers between the imperial family and the government; the second is the division of functions and powers between the central government and the local governments. We already know that China began to have a unified government from the Qin Dynasty onward. A unified government must have a leader. In Chinese history, this political leader was the Emperor. How did Emperors emerge? In Chinese traditional politics, the throne was hereditary, being passed down from father to son. From today's political perspective, people will question the hereditary system. But then, we should be aware that the system for the founding of China as a nation was different from that of ancient Greece and Rome in Western history. These were geographically small states with small populations. On the small peninsula of Greece, for example, the number of small states ran well into the hundreds. A so-called state was no more than a city, with a population of tens of thousands at most. The leader of a city state

could easily be elected by its citizens simply by getting everybody to gather on an open space where the “public will” could be heard. Rome, too, started as a city state and expanded through foreign conquest into an empire. But its central government was still the Greek city state type. By the Qin and Han dynasties, China’s territory was already about the same size as it is today, with the number of households in the tens of millions at least. However, the model of the country’s establishment was not outward conquest, but internal consolidation. The state system of the Han Dynasty was very clearly different from that of the Roman Empire. Furthermore, as an agrarian country, with tens of thousands of farming villages scattered across the land, how on earth could the Chinese back then be expected to practice the “popular vote” system of modern times? Unless we subject history to the judgment of our own day and age, we should recognize that the hereditary nature of the Chinese throne was a necessary or natural practice under the political circumstances then prevailing. In days past, there were quite a few other countries ruled under an Emperor. That China did not practice a democratic election system but had a hereditary Emperor is no proof that Chinese traditional politics was dark and irrational. In feudal times, many families enjoyed hereditary privileges; these were the “aristocrats.” But from the Qin and Han dynasties on, the feudal system was a thing of the past; only the throne was hereditary. Only the Emperor could pass the throne to his son; no other position in the government was hereditary. A Prefecture Governor could not pass his position down to his son any more than a County Magistrate could pass that position to his son. This was categorically a great step forward in the political system. In the feudal times, there was an inseparable relationship between government and certain families. The situation changed in the Qin and Han dynasties: now the government was organized by individuals, not families.

But one big question remained at the time: the relationship between the imperial family and the government. Did the imperial family count as the government? If the imperial family should be separate from the government, how should functions and powers be divided between them? This was the first major issue faced by the Qin and Han dynasties, and it was an issue that would crop up time and time again in China’s political history.

The general historical trend indicates that the Chinese always believed the imperial family should be separate from the government. And it was indeed by this principle that Chinese politics evolved in history. The Emperor was the sole head of state, but the real political power actually resided with the government, not the imperial family. The Prime Minister represented the government. As head of state, the Emperor stood for the unity of the county. As leader of the government, the Prime Minister was actually in charge of all political responsibilities. The division of powers between the Emperor and the Prime Minister was a major subject throughout Chinese political history. In the recent past decades, people have had the idea that China remained under feudal rule or imperial autocracy from the Qin and Han dynasties onward, but that does not accord with historical facts.

On the division of powers between the Emperor and the Prime Minister in the Han Dynasty, let me cite an example. At the time, the Emperor and the Prime Minister each had a “secretariat,” with differences in size. The Emperor’s secretariat consisted of

six departments, which respectively took care of his clothing, meals, hats, banquets, bathing, and documents. Of the six, only the department taking care of the Emperor's documents was the "imperial secretariat" in the real sense. The other five were concerned only with the Emperor's everyday life. The Imperial Secretary was not a high position in the early Han, but it grew more and more important later on.

The earliest Imperial Secretariat was only one of the six departments under the Emperor. What about the Secretariat of the Prime Minister? He had under him 13 departments, which were equivalent to the present-day departments below a ministry. Just to list the names of his 13 departments gives an idea of the huge organization and wide functions and powers of the Prime Minister's Secretariat. Number one, the West Department assisted the Prime Minister in running office work. Number two, the East Department was in charge of promoting and demoting senior officials with an annual salary of 2000 *dan* (=28.8 cubic meters) of grain, and senior military officials. Two-thousand-*dan* officials were the senior-most officials of the time.¹ Clearly, the Prime Minister's Secretariat was in charge of the promotion and demotion of all court officials. Number three, Household, in charge of sacrifice rituals and farming. Number four, Report, in charge of all government reports to the throne, similar to the Imperial Secretariat in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) and the Department of Archives in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644). Number five, Civil Judicial, in charge of civil law. Number six, Transportation, in charge of post and transportation regulations on time and load limits, similar to the present-day Ministry of Transportation. Number seven, Logistics, in charge of actual transportation, somewhat like the Logistics Governor in the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911). Number eight, Anti-robbery, in charge of handling cases of robbery and petty theft. Number nine, Criminal Judicial. These two departments were in charge of criminal law. Number ten, Soldier, in charge of military services. Number 11, Gold, in charge of monetary matters, and salt and iron trade. Number 12, Barn, in charge of grain storage. Number 13, Yellow Pavilion, in charge of record making and keeping. That describes the general affairs taken care of by the Prime Minister. These 13 departments made up the offices directly under the Prime Minister.

We can tell from the names of the departments that it was the Prime Minister, not the Emperor, who dealt with all the administrative affairs in the country. The Emperor had only an Imperial Secretariat or library (in the literary sense) with a staff of just four secretaries at the beginning, whereas the Prime Minister controlled 13 departments covering a much wider range of responsibilities. The 13 department heads were heavy-weight officials, similar to ministers in charge of different fields in later dynasties. This shows clearly that, by legal principle, administrative power was in the hands of the government, not the imperial family. The Prime Minister was the true head of government. This single example illustrates the differentiation between the imperial family and the government, and such a differentiation was generally respected in the history of Chinese traditional politics.

¹There were officials whose annual salaries were higher than 2000 *dan*. (All endnotes in the book are given by the editor unless otherwise specified.)

1.1.2 Organization of the Central Government

Let's now turn to the organization of the central government in the Han Dynasty. The Three Lords and Nine High Officials were the top-level officials in the government. The Three Lords refers to the Prime Minister, who was the chief of the civil officials; the Minister of Defense, who was the chief of the military officials; and the Minister of Supervision who was the Deputy Prime Minister and who assisted his superior in overseeing the entire political machinery. If we have to use present-day language, we could say that the unwritten rule in the Han Dynasty was that the Prime Minister had to be promoted from the post of Deputy Prime Minister. Although the Minister of Defense was at the same level as the Prime Minister, he was solely responsible for military affairs and not supposed to concern himself elsewhere. Thus, the Prime Minister was in reality the top administrator.

The two Chinese characters 丞 (pronounced *cheng*) and 相 (pronounced *xiang*) that form the title of Prime Minister both meant “deputy” in their original usage. The sense of “deputy” in the character *xiang* persists in the roles of modern-day best man and bridesmaid, who perform duties on behalf of the groom and bride. By definition, then, the Prime Minister was a deputy. Whose deputy was he? He was the Emperor's deputy, of course. It was not possible for the Emperor to take care of everything, so the Prime Minister acted on his behalf. Whether things were run well or badly, the Prime Minister, not the Emperor, would be held accountable.

Why was the *cheng xiang* also called 宰 (pronounced *zai*) 相? In feudal times, the most important matter of an aristocrat's family was offering sacrifices to gods and ancestors and the major part of the process was slaughtering (*zai*) sacrificial oxen. To symbolize this, the stewards of the Son of Heaven² and those of the feudal lords, aristocrats and high officials were all titled *zai*. Under the unified rule of the Qin and Han dynasties, rule by families changed to rule by state. Power fell away from all the aristocratic families, but one family, the imperial family, became representative of the state. Thus the Emperor's family steward, or the Imperial Steward, became a political leader of the state, i.e. the Prime Minister. In feudal times, the family steward was called *zai* at home and *xiang* (deputy) when he assisted the master outside the family. According to this tradition, then, *zai xiang* was the legacy of a private title in feudal-age aristocrat families. It was precisely because of this background that the Prime Minister in the Qin and Han dynasties was responsible for not only political affairs of the country but also the family affairs of the Emperor. His job was the same as that of the Minister of State as recorded in the *Rituals of Zhou* (a collection of laws and regulations in pre-Qin-Dynasty era).

But now, with all state affairs in his hands, there was no time for the Prime Minister to take care of the Emperor's family affairs. So a deputy position was set up under the Deputy Prime Minister. The Secondary Deputy Prime Minister was stationed within the imperial palace. This title has the character 中 (pronounced *zhong*), which literally means “center,” denoting that the Secondary Deputy Prime Minister was based inside the imperial palace. It was the same with other officials whose titles had

²Referring to the sovereign ruler of a state and later to the Emperor in dynastic China.

this character. All the Emperor's family affairs fell to him, and since he was deputy to the Deputy Prime Minister, it followed that the family affairs of the Emperor were ultimately managed by the Prime Minister. After all, the Prime Minister was originally a private official, the family steward, of the Emperor. Naturally he should take care of matters in the imperial palace. That was a trace of the old feudal legacy. On the other hand, we could say that the imperial family was under the administration of the government, or that matters in the imperial palace were under the management of the Prime Minister. The Emperor gave his order to the Secondary Deputy Prime Minister, who passed it on to his superior, who in turn conveyed it to the Prime Minister. A report from the Prime Minister to the Emperor went by the same route in the reverse direction. This was a summary of the relationship at that time between the imperial family and the government.

Let's move on to the Nine High Officials. They were the Minister of Rituals, Imperial Gateman, Commander of Bodyguards, Imperial Charioteer, Imperial Judge, Minister of Protocols, Chamberlain of the Imperial Clan, Minister of Finance, and the Palace Administrator of Finance. These positions came with an income of 2000 *dan* of grain per year. They were also called "central 2000-*dan*" officials, because they served at the central-government level. Prefecture Governors, as local officials, also earned 2000 *dan* of grain.

The origins of the names of the Nine High Officials are quite interesting. The Minister of Rituals (太常 pronounced *tai chang*) was called 奉常 (pronounced *feng* [written as 奉] *chang*) in the Qin Dynasty. The character *chang* originally meant "to taste" and *feng* meant "to present." This official was responsible for offering sacrifices to the ancestors and gods. Thus his title literally meant "to present seasonal delicacies." In ancient China, religion meant more than politics. A residential house usually consisted of an ancestral hall (shrine) to the east and the living quarters to the west. In other words, the living and the dead shared the same house. The practice ceased to exist among the common people later but was kept by the imperial family. Wasn't the Qing-Dynasty Ancestral Temple built close up to the east of the Imperial Palace? We might even say that the dead were more important than the living in the ancient family. Offering sacrifices to the ancestors was a big deal and the official in charge of slaughtering oxen as sacrifices was called *zai* (slaughter). In the Han, therefore, the most important office in the court was the Minister of Rituals. By definition, he belonged to the imperial family, taking care of the imperial ancestral temple, and should not be counted as a public official.

The position of Imperial Gateman (光祿勳 pronounced *guang lu xun*) remained in place up to the Qing Dynasty, but the three characters of 光 (pronounced *guang*), 祿 (pronounced *lu*) and 勳 (pronounced *xun*) had lost their original meanings by then. Originally, the character 勳 was written as 閭, meaning "gateman." 光 meant "great" and 祿 was the same as 麓, meaning "mountain foot." Why did the "great mountain foot" mean "great gateman?" This is because in ancient times, the Emperor more often than not made his home on a mountain. It was like Song Jiang (a rebel leader in the late Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127) who made his camp on Mount Liang and his follower Zhu Gui who ran an inn at the mountain foot to serve as Song's gateman and convey information. Thus, while the Emperor lived up on the mountain,

his gate was down at the mountain foot. When *The Book of History* mentioned that Shun was made the Great Gateman of Yao, both being legendary emperors in remote history, it meant that Shun was made the Prime Minister of Yao. We can see that both *guang lu* and *xun* referred to “gateman” in their ancient senses.

The Commander of Bodyguards (卫尉 pronounced *wei wei*) was a military position, in charge of the security of the imperial palace. Back then titles of military positions all included the character 尉 (pronounced *wei*). The Imperial Charioteer (太仆 pronounced *tai pu*) was the Emperor’s driver. In *The Analects* it is mentioned that “when Confucius went to the State of Wei, Ran You drove the chariot.” 仆 (pronounced *pu*) meant “driver.” When the Emperor went out from the palace, the Imperial Charioteer drove for him. The Imperial Judge (廷尉 pronounced *ting wei*) was in charge of cases involving violation of imperial laws. From their respective responsibilities, we can see that the Minister of Rituals, the Imperial Gateman, and the Commander of Bodyguards took care of matters within the imperial palace, whereas the Imperial Charioteer and the Imperial Judge took care of things outside the palace.

The responsibilities of the Minister of Protocols (大鸿胪 pronounced *da hong lu*) evolved up to the Qing Dynasty to those of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, or those of a modern-day department of protocols. 胪 (pronounced *lu*) meant “to pass on word.” According to ancient protocols, for communication between the host and the guest, the deputy of the former needed first to pass on his master’s greetings to the deputy of the latter, rather than directly from host to guest. 鸿 (pronounced *hong*) means “great,” the same as 大 (pronounced *da*). Thus the basic duty of *da hong lu* was essentially that of a messenger. The Chamberlain of the Imperial Clan took care of the affairs of the Emperor’s family members, including those sharing the royal family name and those bearing other family names. By their titles, we see that these seven officials were in charge of the Emperor’s private matters, not government affairs.

We can also see that Han politics still bore many legacies of ancient feudalism. But by then, the imperial family had already become the state, meaning that those in charge of the Emperor’s family matters were now administering state affairs. The Master of Rituals, for example, was concurrently in charge of education, since academic activities all took place in the ancestral temple. It was the same in the Western world. Even today, their education is inseparable from religion. The Imperial Gateman was now also responsible for managing the attendants in the imperial palace. At that time, not all attendants in the imperial palace were eunuchs: Most were ordinary people. If one wanted to become an official in the government, the first step was to become an attendant in the imperial palace, to wait on the Emperor, to gain his recognition before any opportunity of an official position outside the place arose. Most of the Palace Attendants were young men, who were all under the charge of the Imperial Gateman. Kong Anguo, the 11th or 12th-generation grandson of Confucius, once served as a Palace Attendant. What about the Imperial Charioteer? Since he was in charge of chariots and horses, he also took care of weapons and military equipment of the state, the equivalent of today’s tanks and airplanes. The Imperial Judge became the judicial head and the Imperial Gateman became head of foreign

affairs in the process of historical evolution. We have traced the evolution not to show that the Han central government was still a feudal government and that the Nine High Officials were still the Emperor's private servants: These officials were actually under the direction of the Prime Minister and they took care of state affairs.

Both the Minister of Finance and the Palace Administrator of Finance were in charge of financial and economic matters, on behalf of the government and the imperial family respectively. Revenues under the Minister of Finance supported government expenditures, while those under the Palace Administrator of Finance supported the private outgoings of the imperial family. The imperial family could not take money from the coffers of the Minister of Finance. From this we can see the clear legal separation between the imperial family and the government. Back then, it was land tax from across the country that brought in the major revenues, which were put under the Minister of Finance. Taxes from handicraft business and commerce, such as sea salt and mining, were rather small and were managed by the Palace Administrator of Finance. All the Nine High Officials were under the Prime Minister.

As we have already discussed, all of them were in name the Emperor's family servants. Wasn't the Prime Minister fundamentally the Emperor's head steward, then? In other words, the Prime Minister, as head of the government, was indeed entitled to manage everything in the imperial palace. For example, while the Palace Administrator of Finance took care of the Emperor's family outgoings, his official rank was below that of the Prime Minister. Since the Prime Minister could direct the Palace Administrator of Finance, he was then entitled to manage the Emperor's family finance as well.

With this kind of set-up, wasn't the imperial family under the Prime Minister? Back in the feudal era, the Prime Minister was indeed the Emperor's steward, but by the era of prefectures and counties in Han, the imperial family had already become the state. What the Prime Minister now took care of was state affairs, no longer the Emperor's private matters. Thus he had become the head of government. Departments of the Emperor's family had consequently become government departments. In feudal times, a family was a state. The King (the Son of Heaven) of Zhou (1046–256 BC), was a family. The State of Qi and the State of Lu (both under the King of Zhou) were two other families. The country was divided up by many such aristocratic families. In general, there were only family affairs, no government affairs. By the Han, the whole country was represented by only one family, the imperial family, which was recognized by all the people. So family affairs became government affairs and the imperial family became the government. The Prime Minister, in the past the Emperor's family steward, now became head of the government.

The above is briefly about the Three Lords and Nine High Officials of Han, or a brief description of the organization of the central government of the time.

1.1.3 Local Governments of the Han Dynasty

There were two levels of local government in the Han period: the prefecture and the county. The county has remained an administrative unit of local governance up to the present day. The number of prefectures and counties could change at any given time. Generally speaking, there were more than 100 prefectures, each administering ten to 20 counties. Thus, the number of counties ranged from 1100 to 1400 in the Han period. In Chinese history, the local administration of Han was always an example to look up to. The official system of Han has won continuous praise from later generations. This is a point worthy of our attention. In our day and age, the province is the highest level of local administration, and this may be as large as or even larger than a feudal state, with 60–70, or even 100–200 counties under its administration. Too many indeed! The division of administrative regions of Han truly deserves our admiration.

The Prefecture Governor was on a par with the Nine High Officials, with the same remuneration, that is, 2000 *dan* of grain, only they served at different levels of government. A Prefecture Governor could be transferred to the central government to become one of the Nine High Officials and even higher as one of the Three Lords. The Nine High Officials could also be transferred to prefectures as governors. The small number of official levels and flexible transfer of officials distinguished the Han system from later dynasties. It did not mean demotion when one of the Nine High Officials went to serve as a Prefecture Governor, nor did the converse apply. Even the different titles did not carry much distinction. Thanks to the insignificant difference either in name or position between the 100-odd Prefecture Governors and the Nine High Officials, the central government, which executed unified rule across the country, did not appear far above the local governments, which ruled small administrative areas.

1.1.4 Relationship Between the Central and Local Governments

In this relationship, all the prefectures were required to submit a report to the central government every year. It took the form of specific data in various areas showing their administrative performance. Data concerning finance, economy, education, criminal and civil legal affairs, theft and robbery cases, and disasters were recorded in a categorized format. The report had to be submitted to the central government in September or October. This was called Submitting Report.

The central government would dispatch Prefecture Envoys (刺史 pronounced *ci shi*) to inspect the work of prefectures. For this purpose, the whole country was divided into 13 regions, with one Prefecture Envoy assigned to each. On average, each region covered no more than nine prefectures. The Prefecture Envoy's remit was

a limited one: he was supposed to check on six aspects of work and not to concern himself with anything beyond that.

The Prefecture Governor was the real administrator of local affairs. The Prefecture Envoy was just the central government inspector with power to observe and report. So while the Prefecture Governor had a salary of 2000 *dan* of grain, the Prefecture Envoy was only a junior official with a salary of 600 *dan*. But these junior officials were entitled to investigate the work specified by the central government and it was precisely because of their junior position that Prefecture Envoys did not refrain from speaking out. Their immediate director was another deputy to the Deputy Prime Minister, the Palace Supervisor. The central government also had 15 Palace Censors, who were supposed to oversee and report on wrong doings at the central government and even within the imperial palace. Reports by both Prefecture Envoys and Palace Censors were submitted to the Deputy Prime Minister (via the Secondary Deputy Prime Minister), who passed them on to the Prime Minister. Thus the Deputy Prime Minister assisted the Prime Minister in supervising the performance of all the officials.

1.2 Selection of Officials Under the Han

We have talked about the many officials of the central and local governments of Han. Where did they come from? What kind of people were eligible to occupy these various high positions? This is the most important major topic of China's political systems. Under the ancient feudal hereditary system, the son of the Son of Heaven would become the next Son of Heaven, the sons of lords would become lords, and the sons of high officials would become high officials. Only those in the official bloodline could become officials and such questions as I have just raised would never be asked. But things were different in the Qin and Han dynasties.

So, with the hereditary feudal system a thing of the past, who was and who wasn't eligible to run politics? Apart from the hereditary aristocracy, one's thoughts might first turn to the military. It would be easy for those with military power to control the government and officials. But that was not the case in the Han Dynasty. One might then think of the rich, for whom it would be easy to become officials and to enjoy the power of government. Again that was not the case in Han.

The practice we are going to discuss did not exist in a settled form until the reign of Emperor Wu of Han (r. 141–87 BC). The Imperial College, like today's national university, was already in existence. There was only one of its kind, of course. Graduates of the Imperial College were classified into two categories based on their performance in the final examination. Those in category A would be assigned jobs as Palace Attendants, and those in category B as local functionaries.

Palace Attendants served in the imperial palace under the management of the Imperial Gatekeeper. According to standard practice of the time, officials with a salary

of 2000 *dan* of grain, like the Three Lords,³ Nine High Officials, and Prefecture Governors (which numbered more than 100), were all entitled to send their sons and nephews into the palace to serve as attendants. After serving the Emperor for a few years, they would have the chance to be selected as officials when the government needed new ones. Although the practice was not hereditary as in feudal times, it did result in a situation where officialdom was dominated by aristocrats. It was the same in some Western countries even in modern times.

But things changed under the reign of Emperor Wu. As Imperial College graduates in Category A were assigned to work as Palace Attendants, this elite group was no longer dominated by descendants of aristocrats: Their ranks were now joined by many intellectuals. Category B graduates would go back to their native prefectures to serve as functionaries under the Governor. According to the Han system, top-level local officials, like Prefecture Governors and County Magistrates, had to be appointed by the central government, whereas those below them had to be selected from among locals. It is just like a native of Taipei could not serve as the city mayor but all his subordinate officials must be natives of the city. The top official was entitled to appoint local officials. The Three Lords, Nine High Officials, Prefecture Governors, and County Magistrates were appointed by the Emperor and the central government. The Prime Minister was entitled to appoint the heads of the 13 departments under his administration, and the department heads were entitled to appoint their subordinates. Now, if a student from Kuaiji Prefecture graduated from the Imperial College in Category B, he was supposed to return to his native place and work on a probationary basis in the prefecture government. Thus all graduates of the Imperial College were entitled to become either Palace Attendants on probation or local officials on probation.

The selection system of Han was based on local selection. All localities could recommend talent to the central government from time to time. There were two, or we might say three, types of selection. The first type was occasional. For example, when a new Emperor ascended the throne on the death of his predecessor, he would issue a decree calling the whole country to recommend talent to the court. Or, in the event of a major famine, flood or pestilence, which was believed to show heavenly punishment of the government for dereliction of duty, the Emperor would also issue a decree calling on localities to recommend talent, who would come out to advise the government or to render their service to the country. Such selections happened only occasionally.

The talents thus singled out were called Men of Virtue. Once they were accepted by the government, the latter would consult them on several major political questions. The questions were written on bamboo slips. So the process was literally called "questions on bamboo slips." The Men of Virtue would each reply to these questions and the government would then appoint them to certain positions based on their answers. There were no fixed dates or organizations to run such selections. The localities could recommend their candidates, and the Three Lords and other high

³The annual salaries of the Three Lords were more than 2000 *dan*.

officials could recommend theirs. Men of Virtue were those who had special or outstanding abilities.

The second type of selection was held for special purposes. If, for example, the government wanted envoys to the Western Regions in a certain year, it would issue a decree to recruit men who spoke the needed foreign language(s), were ready to endure hardships and were able to handle emergencies. Anyone who considered themselves capable could apply. Or, when the army needed military talent or when the Yellow River burst its dykes and water-control expertise was needed, people who knew such men of ability could recommend them and those who thought themselves up to the requirements could put themselves forward. These were special selections.

Later a regular selection procedure came into being, namely the selection of Filial Sons and Clean Officials. The Han Dynasty often required localities to seek out and recommend Filial Sons and Clean Officials, but the local governments did not always take notice, nor did many candidates put themselves forward either. During Emperor Wu's reign, he issued a decree to the prefectures to the effect that it was totally unacceptable for them not to be able to recommend from their region a single Filial Son or a single Clean Official to the court. Besides, local governors were not only responsible for administration, but also for selecting talent for the country, and if they were unable to select a single Filial Son or a single Clean Official in a year, they were obviously neglecting their duty. So the Emperor called a meeting on how to punish governors who failed to nominate talent. This more or less led to the regular selection of officials. At any rate, every prefecture had to nominate one or two Filial Sons and/or Clean Officials every year as a sign they were fulfilling their duty.

Since there were more than 100 prefectures under the Han, at least more than 200 Filial Sons and Clean Officials would be recommended to the court. Unlike Men of Virtue, who would immediately be appointed to certain positions, Filial Sons and Clean Officials usually started out as Palace Attendants. Thus when an Imperial College B-class graduate was assigned a probationary job in his native prefecture, he still had the chance of recommendation to serve as a Palace Attendant. After serving at the court for a few years, he would then be dispatched to a local official position.

Under the reign of Emperor Wu, Han gradually established an annual nomination system, under which more than 200 Filial Sons and Clean Officials would be recommended to the court. Their number grew, exceeding 2000 over a dozen years or so. Two to three decades later, all the Palace Attendant positions, which numbered about 2000, were filled by Filial Sons and Clean Officials, who were mostly officials on probation and who had been educated at the Imperial College. In today's words, the Palace Attendants, who directly served the Emperor, were now young intellectuals with college degrees. Thus, since Emperor Wu, officialdom gradually came to be dominated by scholars.

Later on, as the number of Palace Attendants grew to exceed the number of posts available, occasional and special selections were both shelved. Selection as Filial Sons and Clean Officials became the sole route to officialdom until the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220). Moreover, selection came to be based on the number of households in specific localities, mostly prefectures and fiefdoms granted by the Emperor to his family members or high officials of merit. A prefecture with more than

200,000 households was eligible to recommend a Filial Son or a Clean Official, who might be one person. But by that time, their titles only indicated a qualification for officialdom, which was different from the practice of early Han. Further on in time, nominated Filial Sons and Clean Officials were required by the central government to sit an exam. Now the selection system for officials had become complete, requiring education, probation, nomination, and examination.

We can see that the selection system was extremely important for politics in Han. A young man first received his education at the Imperial College and then went to serve as an official on probation at a locality. If he performed his duty with merit, he could be noted by the top local official for recommendation to the central government. Only after passing the central government examination could he become a full official. This was the only normal way to officialdom of the time. Almost all the officials of the government came through the route. This could no longer be called government by aristocracy. Even though there were children of aristocrats among the Palace Attendants, they were few in number. It was not a military government, either, because Palace Attendants were not military men. Nor was it a capitalist government, because Palace Attendants did not come from capitalist families. We can only call it a government of scholars.

Han Prime Ministers since Emperors Zhao (r. 87–74 BC) and Xuan (r. 74 BC–49 BC) were almost all scholars. They were also first selected by local governments. They had no family relationship with the Emperor or their predecessors, nor were they high military officers or wealthy men. They entered politics entirely because they were qualified scholars. Starting from Han, we can say that Chinese government in history remained “civil governance,” not aristocratic, nor military, nor commercial. Only scholars were allowed to enter politics, to organize the government, and to handle all political powers.

1.3 The Economic System of the Han Dynasty

We have talked about the formation, functions, and power distribution of the government. Next we are going to discuss the main economic aspect that supported the government—taxation. The Han Dynasty can be said to have realized the ideal of light corvée labor and taxation. Mencius (c. 372–289 BC), who lived in the Warring States Period (475–221 BC), said, “One-tenth taxation is benevolent governance.” It can be inferred that taxation in that period was higher than one-tenth. In the Han Dynasty, the official tax rate was set at one-fifteenth. In practice it was only one-thirtieth. For 100 *dan* of grain, the tax was only a little more than three *dan*. Some Han contemporaries even said that taxation was as low as one-hundredth [see *History of the Former Han* by Xun Yue (AD 148–209)]. During Emperor Wen’s reign (180–157 BC), no land tax was levied for 11 long years, the only tax-free period in Chinese history. The reason was that the country was large with many households. Even light taxation was more than enough to support the government.

But the Han taxation system had one big problem. Land policy was quite liberal at the time. Feudal ownership of land by aristocrats, the Nine-Square Land System,⁴ had long been abolished. Under Han, farmers owned the land they tilled. They were free to use or sell it, usually in times of financial difficulty, which led to acquisition of land holdings. Now, we might well ask: with such low government taxation why did farmers have to sell their land? Of course there were other reasons, which had to do with poll tax, military corvée and other socio-economic considerations, but let us leave these issues aside for the moment. When a farmer sold his land, he became a tenant farmer. The land owner took high rents from the tenant farmers, as much as half of the harvest in some cases. The lighter the government taxation, the more profitable it was for land owners with tenant farmers: The latter had to pay half to the land owners, but land owners only needed to pay one-thirtieth to the government. Low land tax benefited only land owners, not the farmers. This was about land rent.

We have already touched upon the issue of land ownership. In feudal times, all land under heaven belonged to the king (or monarch); all those living off the land were the king's subjects. Land was owned by feudal aristocrats. Land tillers who became too old to farm had to return their share of the land to the owner. This was the main condition of the feudal Nine-Square land ownership. Now that the feudal system was gone and farmers owned the land as their private property, they were free to sell it. The government only collected tax on what the land produced, without bothering about who owned the land. The vender and the buyer entered a contract for the transaction in an entirely non-official business relationship. Therefore, large land owners through free trade were not the same as feudal aristocrats.

Feudal land owners had political power whereas large land holdings were acquired as the result of economic assets. A farmer could freely buy or sell land. It was precisely because land was privately owned by farmers that it could be freely traded and acquired, and that eventually the poor would have no land at all. Later in Chinese history, land policy remained caught between admiration for the equal division of land in feudal times and the advocacy of private land ownership by farmers. Stuck between these conflicting concepts, the issue of land tax was never satisfactorily resolved.

Not all the land of the country was suitable for farming. Who owned the non-arable land, then? Every mountain, every grove of trees, every lake, all belonged to the aristocrats in feudal times, arable or otherwise. Arable land was equally divided (by feudal aristocrats) and rented to farmers under the Nine-Square Land System, while non-arable land, such as mountains, forests and lakes, was forbidden land, which the aristocrats would post men to guard.

Things changed with the times, and arable land ownership gradually shifted to the farmers. But what about the forbidden land? This, too, was gradually infringed upon by common folks, who ventured into make charcoal, to cut timber, to fish or to hunt.

⁴Under the Nine-Square Land System, a feudal aristocrat would divide his land into nine equal squares shaped like the Chinese character 井, retaining the central piece as his own and allocating the other eight to farmers, who were supposed to till the central piece for the owner in lieu of rent. This is one interpretation of the land system at the time.

Such acts were illegal and those who broke into forbidden land were labeled robbers and any profit from their activities was also considered illegal. So the government stationed officers to stop such infringements and was entitled to punish violators, without much success, though. Eventually, in resignation, it posted a tax collector at passes into forbidden land, to take a share of the booty, be it fish or wood. The tax in kind became a new one distinct from land tax. This was the origin of border tariffs and commodity taxes. The new tax was levied as a compromise when the government failed to guard the forbidden land. The trend started from the late Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC). States small in territory or dense in population, such as the Zheng, Jin, and Qi, all adopted this measure.

Even up to the Qin and Han dynasties, when the country had a unified national government, arable land was still allocated to farmers to till for a living, whereas non-arable land, or the forbidden land, was owned by the government, or the imperial family. This is because the country was now owned by one family—the imperial family—not separately by many aristocrats. According to the feudal tradition, all non-arable land should belong to the imperial family. This concept of land ownership influenced the taxation system of the time. Tax from farmland was under the charge of the Minister of Finance to cover government expenditures, while tax from the mountains, seas, and lakes belonged to the Palace Administrator of Finance to cover the Emperor's family expenses. It would be difficult to understand the differentiation without referring to the Nine-Square Land System in feudal times and the subsequent transformations of land ownership.

The distinction between the public (government) and private (imperial family) taxes was quite a logical one initially: Tax from farmland, which was extensive, constituted the larger income whereas commercial tax from mountains, forests, and lakes made up the smaller one. With the larger part going into the government coffers and the smaller part going to the imperial family, the Emperor was not at all acting in a selfish way. However, after the Warring States Period, profits from salt and iron gradually increased, the socio-economic situation changed and eventually profits from the mountains, seas, and lakes surpassed tax revenues from farmland. This was something unanticipated by policymakers. One might draw a comparison with the late Qing government yielding customs control at trading ports to foreign powers without realizing the increased tax from customs in the years to come, and thus suffering huge losses. Different dynasties, the same outcome. With commercial taxes gradually surpassing land tax, the Palace Administrator of Finance now had more revenues than the Minister of Finance.

Emperor Wu was an ambitious and visionary ruler. Launching punitive expeditions against the Huns and sending envoys to the Western Regions all involved huge military expenses. When he had exhausted all the money under the Minister of Finance, and even the savings left by his father (Emperor Jing, r. 157–141 BC) and grandfather (Emperor Wen), the government found itself in a financial fix. What could be done? The land tax had been set at one-thirtieth and could not be increased at will. So Emperor Wu had to generously divert money from the Palace Administrator of Finance. In other words, the Emperor donated his family revenues to the government. At the same time, Emperor Wu ordered rich people in the localities,

mainly salt and iron merchants, to donate just as he had willingly volunteered to. But response was apathetic. Those with great wealth simply ignored the government's call. Emperor Wu must have wondered: Where did your money come from in the first place? Wasn't it I who put the mountains, seas, and lakes under your management, enabling you to extract salt and smelt iron and to make your fortunes? Now I have donated my family income to the country, yet you won't follow my example. So let me take back all the non-arable land and let the government run it! This became the famous Salt and Iron Policy during the reign of Emperor Wu.

Salt and iron were the greatest and most easily profitable businesses of the time, being indispensable commodities for food and utensil manufacture. Now the Emperor took back the right to extract salt from the seas and mine iron from the mountains. No merchants were allowed to run the businesses as their own. The government arranged officials to manage salt extraction and iron smelting and collected all the profits. Thus salt and iron became state monopolies. It was very much like the so-called state socialism initiated, allegedly, by the Germans in modern times. But such a system had already been invented by us Chinese as early as the Han Dynasty. Later dynasties up to the Qing retained the system more or less intact, with minor revisions. The system was not confined to salt and iron. Liquor, for example, as a luxury good for pleasure, was also put under state monopoly, since it was processed from daily essentials like rice and wheat.

There must have been a theoretical basis to systems like this. When we talk about economic thought in Chinese history, we must pay attention to specific measures of the various policies. When we talk about economic systems, we must pay attention to the historical background of the evolution of a policy. This is why I started with the legal distinction in ownership between farmland and forbidden land in ancient feudal times, the division of the Palace Administrator of Finance and the Minister of Finance (which respectively took care of tax revenues for the imperial family and the government), before talking about Emperor Wu's Salt and Iron Policy, which led to the government monopoly of salt and iron. The policy was not just a matter of ideas and theory; it was based on hard realities steeped in important historical traditions.

The issue was actually the subject of long debate. A conference was convened during the reign of Emperor Zhao (Emperor Wu's son), at which government financial officials and representatives of the common people from different parts of the country debated the issue quite heatedly. One of the common representatives left behind a record, which became the famous *Salt and Iron Theory*. Of course the people wanted the trades to be open and the government wanted monopoly. It would be impossible to estimate the merits and demerits of the policy without carefully studying the opinions of the contemporaries. When we discuss a historical system, we should pay full attention to the historical traditions then prevailing and the ideas of its contemporaries. This is what we should do, rather than impose the opinions of our own times to write off the contemporary opinions in history!

To summarize the economic policy of Han, we might say that it had restrictions on handicraft business and commerce, like our own restrictions on capital in modern times. Tax on farmland, on the other hand, was light. But land ownership was far from being equal. Given these realities, during Emperor Wu's reign, Dong Zhongshu

(179–104 BC) suggested capping the amount of land any individual landowner could possess. Sadly, his suggestion was not put into practice. Thus when Wang Mang (45 BC–AD 23) took over power and reigned over the country,⁵ he carried out a drastic reform, claiming all land as imperial property for redistribution. His real intention was to restore the feudal Nine-Square Land System, but the result was wholesale chaos. After Wang Mang's failure, no major reform of the land system was implemented in Chinese history.

1.4 The Military System of the Han Dynasty

The Han operated a system of national military service. Such a system was not created in the West until the modern age by Otto von Bismarck (1815–1898), Minister President of Prussia, after his country had suffered repression. Back in the Han Dynasty, a man was required to enter military service at the age of 23. There was an internal reason for the age. Boys entered manhood at 20, when they were old enough to farm independently. As it was impossible for agriculture to produce as much as was needed, thrift was the only way to sustainability. The saying went “three years of harvests to ensure one year of surplus.” Under normal circumstances, it was impossible to have good harvests every year. On average, there was always one lean year in every three. Everything put aside would be used up in the lean year. If a good harvest could be ensured every year, there should be two years' worth of surplus in six years and three years' worth of surplus in nine years. However, it was absolutely impossible for agriculture to produce bumper harvests in nine consecutive years or lean harvest in three years in a row. While a grown-up man was given land at the age of 20, when he was able to make a living on his own, his family responsibility should be taken into consideration first before he should be conscripted. At the age of 23, he should have already saved a year's worth of grains and, according to the regulations of the time, should be able to serve in the army for the state. This rule, therefore, came not only out of economic considerations; it was actually a moral decision.

When we examine all regulations in history, we should always note the ideas and theories of the contemporaries behind each of them. Politics is an important part of culture. It is impossible for a system to come into being without any reason. In the early years of Han, most government officials came from the countryside. Their knowledge of the hardship of the people enabled them to establish such a law. Chinese people in modern days often hold our past political traditions in contempt. They also criticize China for lacking systematic political theories and great political thinkers. It is true that there were few monographs on politics among works of the past and few people who became famous solely for their political thinking. This does not mean that the Chinese did not have any political theories or political thinking. The actual reason is that most scholars ended up as officials. Instead of writing from

⁵Wang Mang usurped power from the imperial Liu family in AD 8, and renamed the dynasty Xin and reigned until AD 23.

imagination, they put their political theories and thinking into practice. There was no need for them to write books that were not related to reality, to create empty theory in book form.

Therefore, Chinese people's political theory had long merged with actual politics. Otherwise, why did the Emperor and the Prime Minister hold separate powers? Why were recommendation and examination necessary for the selection of officials? Why should land tax be kept as light as possible? Why was commercial capital put under certain restriction? Why did national conscription begin at age 23? This is why we should pay attention to political systems of the past before we study political thinking of the past. China never lacked political systems, each backed with its respective theory and thinking. How could one dismiss them merely as dictatorship and darkness?

Conscription in the Han Dynasty was carried out in several forms. One was to serve at the capital; the second was to serve at the frontier; and the third was to serve in one's local area. Every male was supposed to perform the three kinds of army services, with the third kind starting at the age of 20.

The troops serving at the capital were divided into two armies, the South and the North. The South Army guarded the imperial palace and the North Army guarded the capital. They together added up to fewer than 70,000 men. Adult males in all parts of the country took turns to serve as guards at the capital for one year. They were entitled to extremely good benefits: The central government paid for their travel to and from the capital, the Emperor gave a welcome banquet upon their arrival and another upon their departure, and the government also provided for their daily necessities, such as food and clothing.

It was different for frontier soldiers. They had to bear all the expenses. When it came to service, however, the term was only three days. This, again, was a legacy of the feudal times. Back then, the sizes of states were rather small. A state with a radius of 25 km was considered quite large. Thus the longest distance from a local place to the capital was at most 25 km and it would take a soldier only half a day to travel from home to the frontier. Adding in three days' service, he needed only five days to perform the duty and return home. So, frontier service in feudal times was not very demanding; one only had to bring rations for five days.

After uniting all the states into one country, the First Emperor of Qin (r. 246–210 BC) did not seem to realize that it was a problem: he still required three days' service at the frontier. A soldier in Kuaiji (in present-day southeast China) could be required to serve at the frontier in Yuyang (in present-day north China) for three days, as was the feudal practice. But the journey to and from the frontier would take more than half a year and the soldiers had to bring their own provisions. How troublesome! The whole country was now united and the national system had changed, but the First Emperor of Qin neglected to reform the frontier service system. Perhaps it was because the government was too busy and the Emperor was too pleased with his feat of forcibly uniting the six states to notice small matters like this. But such neglect eventually led to social turmoil and the revolt led by Chen Sheng (?–208 BC) and Wu Guang (?–208 BC).

Modern Chinese often argue that Chinese politics has remained unchanged for 2000 years. But how could that be, whether in China or elsewhere? A case in point is frontier service, which changed under the Han Dynasty. While the term of frontier service was still three days, one could opt not to go. Instead, one could pay cash to the government to have one's service canceled, 100 cash for one day and 300 for three days. Supposing 100 people preferred to pay, their aggregated money would cover the expenses for 300 days of frontier service. The government would use the money to hire a man who was willing to go and to serve for 300 days. With this sum of money, that soldier would have enough for his expenses at the frontier and provide for his family at the same time. This was a flexible practice. In principle, every male should serve at the frontier, even the sons of Prime Ministers. One Han Dynasty Prime Minister was commended in history because he actually sent his son to serve at the frontier for three days.

In the Han Dynasty, the Prefecture Governor had a military counterpart in the Prefecture Commander, mirroring the central government's Prime Minister and Minister of Defense. The Prefecture Governor was the local chief of administration and the Prefecture Commander was the local military chief in charge of local troops. All adult males, without exception, took part in collective drills every autumn. It was a major inspection called Commander Inspection and lasted a month. At the end of the drilling, everybody returned home. When there was need by the country, they would be called together. Thus, these troops were a kind of national militia. They were trained according to local conditions, for example, cavalry and charioteers, navy and infantry.

The South and North Armies in the capital, frontier soldiers and local troops were all at the disposal of the country when needed.

Apart from military service, adult males had to render labor to the state. This was a big issue from the Spring and Autumn Period, the Warring States Period, through the Qin and Han, and down to later dynasties. We discuss it now as a historical issue. It was compulsory for each and every adult male to render free labor to the state. It is like today's government collecting laborers to build airports and highways, the difference being that such labor was unpaid in ancient times. All adult males were entered into registration books and each was subject to a month's unpaid labor to the state. In the Han Dynasty, the practice was called Rotating Labor. Thus, a farmer had to serve as a guard in the capital, as a soldier at the frontier and as a national militiaman in his home area. It was quite easy to be trained as a national militiaman in the Han, like taking part in an autumn sports meet nowadays. In comparison, one month's labor was much more demanding. However, if one preferred, one could pay 200 cash to the government in lieu of one month's labor.

Besides these three types of military service and a type of forced labor, all the people, including children, were subject to poll tax. This rule had a serious flaw. The government did not provide a basic living for all the people or ensure employment for everybody and the land in the country was not equally distributed. Even so, all were required to perform various duties for the country. Anybody failing to perform those duties fully was considered a violator of law. They would be arrested and many were forced to work as laborers for government departments. As a result,

some people preferred to sell themselves as private laborers. According to rules of the time, laborers must pay double poll tax, but it was their owners who should pay. Therefore, there were many laborers in the Han.

In later dynasties, an unemployed man could live as a beggar or wanderer and the government would not bother him. That was not allowed in the Han. You had to serve in the army, build airports and highways, and you had to pay poll tax. Your name and your address were on government records. If you didn't perform your duties, you must pay relevant amounts of money. Otherwise you had violated the law. Even if you became a beggar, your name was still on the government's household register and you were still responsible for government duties. So people preferred to sell themselves as laborers.

In the Han, to become a laborer did not mean loss of freedom. Voluntary laborers had only sold their duties forced on them by the government. To restrict the practice, the government doubled the poll tax on laborers. Even so, rich families could actually make fortunes by keeping a large number of laborers. For example, charcoal burning in the mountains and mining all needed a huge labor force. To become a laborer was to join the fortune-making groups. Thus, laborers actually had a better living than ordinary families. The situation was recorded in detail in "Biographies of Craftsmen and Merchants" in *Records of the Historian*. Laborers in the Han Dynasty were completely different from slaves of the Roman Empire, most of them being prisoners of war. In the Han, the laborers were farmers who chose to leave the land to join large-scale industrial and commercial groups. There was no comparison between the two.

In addition to regular military services, there were volunteer troops in the Han. Should the country need, men were free to apply to join the army. This was known as "young men from fine families joining the army." Most of them were from rich families, especially those near the frontiers. They would practice cavalry and archery at home and watch out for anything that went wrong in the country. Then they would apply to join the army and to win positions of nobility on the basis of military feats achieved. It was prevalent trend in frontier prefectures. An outstanding example was the family of General Li Guang (?–119 BC) in Longxi (in present-day northwest China).

1.5 Merits and Demerits of the Han System

Let us now briefly point out some shortcomings of the Han system. In terms of the economy, farmland was not properly distributed, which resulted in merging. The rich had boundless fields while the poor had no land to farm at all, so that the government's policy of low land tax did not produce the intended results. When Wang Mang reclaimed the land as imperial property, he met with resistance by most people and the practice ended in failure. But the Eastern Han continued Wang Mang's ban on the labor system and issued several edicts to stop employment of laborers. They produced little effect because the socio-economic conditions remained unchanged.

In terms of the military, it was not enough for the troops to drill together only for a month in a year for a country the size of China, despite skills training for various types of troops in different places. As for the South and North Armies in the capital, they were standing armies, but the service term was only a year and the total number was less than 70,000. Therefore, even though all eligible men were listed in military service across the country, the troops were not enough for use. In times of war, dispatching troops was also a problem, like moving them from Kuaiji, and Wu and Chu states (in present-day southeast China), to Yuyang and Shanggu (in present-day north China). Therefore, the national service system involved large numbers but training was too simple and dispatch too unwieldy. It existed in name only and fell short of solving real problems.

In terms of government organization, as mentioned before, the Emperor and the Prime Minister had separate powers. The imperial family and the government were also separate from each other. This was sort of an unwritten law, and unwritten laws like this often seemed to matter more in China, which lacked explicit stipulations on critical issues. An unwritten law allowed for flexibility, which could be said to be a strong point. On the other hand, it also had a drawback. When the Emperor happened to be ambitious or over-ambitious, capable but conceited, he was likely to infringe upon the Prime Minister's powers. It was unlike modern Western countries, where the monarch, no matter how capable, is constitutionally prevented from interfering with the Prime Minister's business.

The great talent and bold vision of Emperor Wu of Han rendered the Prime Minister powerless. The Nine High Officials took orders directly from the Inner Court. In this way, the Imperial Secretary, the Emperor's private secretary, became very powerful. The Crown Prince had died before Emperor Wu's deathbed decision to pass the throne to his youngest son, the would-be Emperor Zhao. Before that, Emperor Wu had put the young heir's mother to death for fear that she would interfere with state affairs. Emperor Wu also needed someone to manage the imperial family. Before his time, the Prime Minister was in charge of the Emperor's family affairs. But as Emperor Wu had taken over the Prime Minister's responsibilities, how could the latter take care of affairs of the Inner Court? Before his death, therefore, Emperor Wu also appointed Huo Guang (?–68 BC) (a relative of the Empress of Emperor Wu) as Grand Commander-General to assist the young Emperor. Huo was a representative of the imperial palace. A relative of the imperial family, he was entitled to represent the imperial family.

In principle, the Prime Minister was actually the representative of the imperial palace; he was the Deputy Emperor. But now, Emperor Wu had installed a Grand Commander-General, instead of the Prime Minister, to assist the young Emperor. In that way, the Outer Court led by the Prime Minister and the Inner Court, the imperial family represented by the Grand Commander-General, were prone to conflict. As assistant to the Emperor, the Grand Commander-General was leader of the Inner Court. The Outer Court was still under the charge of the Prime Minister.

Later, upon Emperor Zhao's death (74 BC), King Changyi, named Liu He (an aristocrat of the imperial clan, ?–59 BC) was installed on the throne. But he was dethroned within a month (thus his posthumous title of Dethroned Emperor in Han history)

and Emperor Xuan was enthroned. When dethroning the Emperor and enthroning another, Huo Guang did, on behalf of the imperial family, convene meetings of the Nine High Officials. When someone suggested that the Prime Minister be invited to the meetings, Huo replied that this was the Emperor's family affair, that the Prime Minister needed not to be involved because he represented the government, and that they only needed to report to the Empress Dowager after a decision was made. His words sounded reasonable on first hearing. He regarded the inheritance of the throne as a private matter of the imperial family, in which the Prime Minister—the government leader—needed not to be involved. What he did not realize was that the imperial family existed because of the Emperor and the Emperor existed because of the government. Inheritance of the throne was a matter of the government, not of the imperial family. I say this not at all in an attempt to explain history in modern concepts. It was what actually happened in history.

In 184 BC, Lü Zhi (?–180 BC), the Empress of the founding Emperor Gaozu (r. 202–195 BC), issued an edict to the effect that the Emperor⁶ was unlikely to recover from his long illness to rule the country. She ordered the court officials to have discussions about a new Emperor. Even though Empress Lü was a power-greedy dictator,⁷ she did not go so far as to ignore the court on the matter of enthroning a new Emperor. When Emperor Zhao died in the first year of Yuanping Reign (74 BC), Huo Guang also called upon court officials to recommend a new Emperor. Clearly, the inheritance of the throne was bound by government law. If the Emperor did not have a son or if any other sort of unusual situation arose, the government was responsible for collective consultations on a decision. But this law was an unwritten one, which allowed Huo Guang to take advantage of the situation. However, even though Huo Guang claimed that the government leader needed not to be involved with matters of the imperial family, he still had to consult with the other high officials of the government. That means he was still concerned about and dared not to do away with existing customs altogether.

Another point is, the Imperial Secretary was only the secretary of the Inner Court; all the officials in the Inner Court were under the administration of the Secondary Deputy Prime Minister. Now the imperial family had another representative, Huo Guang, to head the Imperial Secretariat in the name of assisting the throne in his capacity as Grand Commander-General. He did not allow the Prime Minister to know about affairs of the imperial family. On the other hand, he concerned himself with government affairs as representative of the imperial family. In this way, the imperial family placed itself above the government, a situation likely to cause serious problems. Later, Emperor Xuan reduced the power of the Huo family and restored the Secondary Deputy Prime Minister as director of the Imperial Secretariat. The Secondary Deputy Prime Minister reported to the Deputy Prime Minister, who in turn reported to the Prime Minister, thus re-opening communication between the

⁶This refers to Liu Gong, whom Lü Zhi had installed in 188 BC and whom she then murdered in 184 BC.

⁷Lü Zhi was in actual control of the Han Empire after Emperor Gaozu died in 195 BC till her death in 180 BC.

Inner Court and the Outer Court. The Grand Commander-General lost importance and the Huo family fell out of power.

Such change of power shows that the Han system did give careful consideration to the relationship between the Emperor and the Prime Minister, and to that between the imperial family and the government. Although there was not a specific regulation forbidding the Emperor to interfere with affairs of the government, this was not a big mistake. Should the Emperor be absolutely kept away from government affairs, the appointment of the Prime Minister would be a problem. Back in history, the Emperor was not elected by the people; nor was there a people-representing parliament to monitor the government. That was a limitation of history, not the personal intention of one or two Emperors. So the relationship between the imperial family and the government, and that between the Emperor and the Prime Minister were rather subtle.

The ambitious and visionary Emperor Wu arrogated all the power to himself. That was not a problem. The problem arose after he died and when a Grand Commander-General came to assist his young successor, as had been arranged by Emperor Wu shortly before his death. In Emperor Xuan's reign, while the Huo family had fallen from power, there was still a Grand Commander-General from the Empress' family to assist the Emperor. The Inner Court was still more powerful than the Outer Court. The situation led to Wang Mang's usurping of imperial power. Wang had come to power via the position of Grand Commander-General.

Emperor Guangwu (r. AD 25–57) of the Eastern Han Dynasty, learning from the mistake of his predecessors, grabbed all power in his own hands. As a result, the position of the Imperial Secretary became weightier. Meanwhile, at the Outer Court, the Prime Minister's power was divided into three parts. Originally the Three Lords referred to the Prime Minister, the Minister of Defense and the Deputy Prime Minister, and the Prime Minister was the top leader of the national government. With the installation of the Grand Commander-General, the Three Lords became the Grand Minister, Grand Commander and Grand Deputy Minister. Each had charge of three of the Nine High Officials. The change, taking place in the Western Han Dynasty, was meant to solve the conflict between the Grand Commander and the Prime Minister. However, the arrangement led to the situation where the Grand Deputy Minister was completely limited to the Outer Court while the Grand Commander still represented the imperial family. The Deputy Prime Minister used to be able to take care of imperial family affairs, but now the Grand Deputy Minister could not. The Prime Minister lost power when he was changed to Grand Minister; the same happened to the Deputy Prime Minister when he was changed to Grand Deputy Minister. Real power remained in the hands of the Grand Commander. The situation was caused by unclear division of power between the imperial family and the government. In later dynasties, the so-called Department of Supervision was a position that shifted from the imperial family to the government, following the trend in the Han as described above.

In the early years of the Eastern Han, Emperor Guangwu kept power in his own hands. The Three Lords were mere prestigious nominal positions. Real power was vested in the Imperial Secretary. In other words, it was the Emperor who had all the power. This is why later generations criticized Emperor Guangwu for failing to

establish good rules, despite some good policies. This is a historical view. Emperor Guangwu was a good monarch, as were Emperor Ming (r. AD 57–75) and Emperor Zhang (r. AD 75–88). However, they all adopted good policies without establishing good rules. As a result, things went well when the Emperor was good, but, in terms of politics, there were no rules to restrain a bad Emperor. This was a big problem in the political system of Eastern Han and it remained so in later dynasties too.

There were also problems in the selection of officials in the Han Dynasty. As has already been discussed, originally, Emperor Wu wanted local governors to recommend Filial Sons and Clean Officials. Later on, to be recommended as a Filial Son or Clean Official became the only channel to officialdom, to the exclusion of other channels. Eventually, the number of candidates was decided by the number of households in a prefecture, that is, one per 200,000 households. There was no longer any distinction between a Filial Son and a Clean Official. The recommendation only meant qualification for entering the official ranks. In response to the nepotism and embezzlement emerging in the recommendation process, the imperial court supplemented it with an examination. Recommendation thus lost its original purpose but opened political power to the whole country. From then on, either selection or examination, candidates were all rationed by region. All regions were allotted a certain number of candidates based on their population size, irrespective of the level of their economic and cultural development. The central government was always staffed by officials from all regions, to the neglect of none. It always had a national representation and people from every part of the country could all hope to enter the government. In actuality, there were always candidates from across the country entering the central government.

At the same time, when it came to appointing Prefecture Governors and County Magistrates, locals were avoided. Therefore, while the central government always had a national representation, local governments were prevented from representing their respective localities. This system ensured lasting national unity and enabled communication between different regions in education and customs. It also promoted integration and balance in local cultural and economic development, preventing segregation and separation. This Han system was carried on by later dynasties up to the Qing. It was one of the key points in Chinese traditional political systems.

What I'm going to talk now is whether the Han selection system was in line with democratic rights in modern times. In the first place, the right to recommend resided with local governors, not the local public. Virtuous governors would certainly select real talent by soliciting opinion from the people; corrupt governors, on the other hand, would recommend candidates out of selfish purposes. Secondly, once candidates were recommended, their appointment was entirely decided by the central government. With the addition of examination, surely that means the right of selection was actually in the hands of those already in power?

Moreover, generally speaking, one had to attend school before being able to become an official on probation, and then have the chance to be recommended. The process seemed most reasonable: starting from education, going through internship, recommendation and examination, and finally appointment. If practiced properly, it seems unlikely to have any problem. But there were problems all the same. In

ancient society, access to schooling was by no means easy. Access to books was the most outstanding difficulty. Books were written on bamboo slips or silk, seldom on paper, not to mention printing. To my mind, the impact of printing technology on the dissemination and evolution of cultures was far greater than that of the atomic bomb in the modern age. Printing is one of the greatest inventions in the world. It was invented first in China, but did not become widespread until the Tang and Song (960–1279) dynasties. Before that, books had to be copied by hand. One bamboo slip had room for only about 20 characters; the cost of copying an entire book was huge. It was even more expensive to copy a book onto silk. Moreover, one had to travel far to learn from a scholar in order to copy his books. These put tremendous limitations on reading and learning. But if you were born into a scholar's family, you would experience no such difficulties.

Therefore, while the titles of nobility were not inheritable in the Han Dynasty as in the feudal society, books were. In reality, families with books to pass on were able to produce scholars, who were then able to enter politics. It was no different inheriting noble titles. The political system prohibited the capitalization of handicraft business and commerce as a measure to prevent a big divide between the rich and poor. Learning and books, on the other hand, had become capital in disguise. So there was a saying to the effect that it was preferable to leave one's children a book than to leave them a basket of gold. In other words, books were more valuable than gold as capital.

Back then, a family of scholars was very likely to become a family of officials, one of power and wealth, such as a family that had produced an official with a salary of 2000 *dan* of grain per year. An official of this rank could hold the position of Prefecture Governor, with entitlement to recommend new officials to the central government. After serving in several prefectures, an official of this rank would have recommended quite a few officials. As beneficiaries of his recommendation, they would repay him in personal favors. They would, for instance, recommend their benefactor's offspring if they were appointed as head of his native prefecture. As a result, the children and grandchildren of those who had recommended officials were most likely to be recommended.

As previously discussed, the number of recommendations each prefecture could make was small and limited. And they were always given to the same few families. The result was that every prefecture had a few prominent families, which remained politically influential for generations. These families later became well known by the name of their native prefectures. Such families were equally distributed in all parts of the country, a situation I have termed "pedigree society." It was not a feudal society or a capitalist society, but inequality existed all the same. There were no feudal aristocrats, but there were scholar-aristocrats; there was no capital of money, but there was capital of books. While the political system of the country did not prescribe to these families the privilege of inheriting their social status, they did actually enjoy such privilege because of their family background.

The "pedigree society" that flourished from the Wei (AD 220–265) and Jin (AD 265–420) dynasties onward had its origin in the selection system for officials back in Han times. The Han selection system was not unsound in the original intention.

It simply deteriorated with the passage of time. However, the change was not particular to the Han selection system. No political system, either ancient or modern, either Chinese or foreign, can remain sound forever. If a good political system could remain perfect forever, it would suffocate politics, as there would be no need for later generations to work at improving politics. It is precisely because no political system can remain sound forever that we have to make continuous efforts for improvement. A political system is but one item of history. Nothing in human history has ever remained unchanged for a hundred years. How could a political system remain good for a hundred or even two hundred years?

Let's take another look at the Han system. This separated the powers of the government and the imperial family, and of the Prime Minister and the Emperor. The arrangement was designed not out of selfish consideration by the Emperor, nor can we blame those in power for its imperfections. We cannot expect any system to be perfect, to be impeccable. The Han system shows they recognized the authority of the Prime Minister and the government, besides the authority of the Emperor and the imperial family.

The selection system shows that the authorities adopted an objective standard, rather than personal liking or disliking, in choosing candidates for the government. At least they understood that an objective standard was preferable to blood relations or the degree of power. Rather than blood relations, nobility, power, wealth, the Han authorities decided on education, learning, and administrative internship as the standard for selecting officials. Moreover, they distributed opportunity equally across the country. We cannot but recognize the rationality of the system, and the transparency and progressiveness of those times.

In economic policies, the Han adopted low taxes to reduce the burden on the common people and restrictive measures to prevent the rich getting richer. The purpose was to maintain equality. Such policies should not be criticized as dark or unreasonable.

Problems occurred as the systems evolved, such as in government organization, the selection of officials, and economic policies. Conflict arose between the imperial family and the government. The selection system led to the emergence of new aristocrats. The economic and military systems also became problematic. What I want to repeatedly emphasize is that we should not dismiss the political system of Han as no good or accuse all past systems as autocratic and dark.

The Wei, Jin, and Southern and Northern dynasties that followed Han never had a decent government, not to mention any decent political system. After Han, the Tang was the next dynasty with a decent political system, which was, of course, different from the Han system. The Tang had a brand new system. When the Tang system became problematic, the Song Dynasty changed it to a new one. It was the same case with the Ming and then the Qing. If we dismiss China's politics for the 2000-plus years since the Qin simply as autocratic without paying attention to and studying history, we have departed from historical reality.

Glossary

Ancestral Temple	太庙 Taimiao
“Biographies of Craftsmen and Merchants” in <i>Records of the Historian</i>	《史记·货殖传》Shiji·Huozhizhuan
Category	科 Ke
Chamberlain of the Imperial Clan	宗正 Zongzheng
civil governance	士人政府 Shirenzhengfu
Commander Inspection	都试 Dushi
Commander of Bodyguards	卫尉 Weiwei
County Magistrate	县令 Xianling
<i>dan</i> = 14.4L	担 Dan
department	曹 Cao
Department of Archives (in the Ming Dynasty)	通政司 Tongzhengsi
Department of Supervision	御史台 Yushitai
Deputy Prime Minister	御史大夫 Yushidafu
feudal hereditary system	封建世袭制度 Fengjianshixizhidu
Filial Sons and Clean Officials	孝廉 Xiaolian
frontier service system	戍边制度 Shubianzhidu
Grand Commander	大司马 Dasima
Grand Commander-General	大司马大将军 Dasimadajiangjun
Grand Deputy Minister	大司空 Dasikong
Grand Minister	大司徒 Dasitu
<i>History of the Former Han</i>	《前汉记》Qianhanji
Imperial Charioteer	太仆 Taipu
Imperial College	太学 Taixue
Imperial Gateman	光禄勋 Guangluxun
Imperial Judge	廷尉 Tingwei
Imperial Secretariat	尚书处 Shangshuchu
Imperial Secretariat (in the Tang Dynasty)	枢密院 Shumiuyan
Imperial Secretary	尚书 Shangshu
Inner Court	内廷 Neiting
Local functionaries	吏 Li
Local selection	乡举里选 Xiangjulixuan
Logistics Governor	漕运总督 Caoyunzongdu
Master of Rituals	太常 Taichang

Men of Virtue	贤良/贤人 Xianliang/Xianren
Minister of Defense	太尉 Taiwei
Minister of Finance	大司农 Dasinong
Minister of Protocols	大鸿胪 Dahonglu
Minister of State	天官冢宰 Tianguanzhongzai
Nine High Officials	九卿 Jiuqing
Nine-Square Land System	井田制 Jingtianzhi
North Army	北军
Outer Court	外廷 Waiting
Palace Administrator of Finance	少府 Shaofu
Palace Attendant	郎官 Langguan
Palace Censor	侍御史 Shiyushi
Palace Supervisor	御史丞 Yushicheng
Prefecture Commander	都尉 Duwei
Prefecture Envoy	部刺史 Bucishi
Prefecture Envoy	刺史 Cishi
Prefecture Governor	太守 Taishou
Prefectures and Counties	郡县制度 Junxiangzhidu
Prime Minister	丞相 Chengxiang
Prime Minister	宰相 Zaixiang
questions on bamboo slips	策问 Cewen
Report	计簿 Jibu
<i>Rituals of Zhou</i>	《周官》(《周礼》) Zhouguan (Zhouli)
Rotating Labor	更卒 Gengzu
Salt and Iron Policy	盐铁政策 Yantiezhengce
Salt and Iron Theory	盐铁论 Yantielun
Secondary Deputy Prime Minister	御史中丞 Yushizhongcheng
senior officials with an annual salary of 2,000 <i>dan</i> of grain	二千石长吏 Erqiandanzhangli
Son of Heaven	天子 Tianzi
South Army	南军
Submitting Report	上计 Shangji
<i>The Analects</i>	《论语》 Lunyu
<i>The Book of History</i>	《尚书》 Shangshu
Three Lords	三公 Sangong

Chapter 2

The Tang Dynasty



2.1 Government Organization of the Tang Dynasty

2.1.1 *Change of the Prime Minister's Power from Han to Tang*

The Han (206 BC–AD 220) and the Tang (AD 618–907) are the two dynasties that can best represent China in history. We talked about the Han system in the last lecture and now we'll move on to the Tang, beginning with Tang government. As in the Han and since, government was separate from the imperial family. As regards the imperial family, succession to the throne remained the same, apart from the fact, of minor importance, that it changed hands from the Liu ruling family in the Han to the Li ruling family in the Tang. The Tang government, however, was very different from the Han government. The biggest difference lay in Prime Ministerial power, which was the most important in the government and which led to the change of the entire system.

In modern parlance, the Tang government was led by a committee whereas the Han government was led by the Prime Minister. In other words, the Han Prime Minister held the administrative power of the whole country, while the Tang divided the Prime Minister's power among several ministries. These ministries were staffed by numerous officials, who made decisions through joint meetings. In the Han, the Prime Minister would also convene meetings to discuss major state affairs, which were attended by the Emperor, the Prime Minister and other court officials. Since the Tang divided the power of the Prime Minister among different ministries, they would often meet to discuss government policies of the highest level. The Han Prime Minister had a Deputy Prime Minister; the Prime Minister was in charge of administration and the Deputy Prime Minister was in charge of supervision. The Tang had three administrative ministries: the Secretariat, the Ministry of Review, and the Executive Ministry. Their powers would have to be aggregated to match those of the Han Prime Minister, and even so did not include the power of supervision.

The Secretariat was headed by the Chief Secretary, the Ministry of Review was headed by the Minister of Review, and the Executive Ministry was headed by the Executive Minister. Of the nine official ranks in the Tang, the first two ranks were all held by senior statesmen, who did not involve themselves in actual administration. Those at the third level and below were the practicing officials. The Chief Secretary, the Minister of Review and the Executive Minister were all at the third rank. As to the origin of the three departments, by name the Executive Minister was the secretary at the Inner Court, as we discussed in the lecture on Han. The Chief Secretary and the Minister of Review, by the literal meaning of their titles, should be respectively archivist and attendant at the Inner Court in the Han. In other words, all these three major officials would have served at the Inner Court in the Han. But it was now the Tang Dynasty and these officials all served in the government, or Outer Court. They now had completely different responsibilities.

Actually, in its original sense, Prime Minister referred to two household stewards in aristocratic families back in the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC). They evolved into government officials in the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han dynasties. Later on, the power of the Prime Minister was lost to a number of other Inner Court officials, who became government executives. These were the three ministries of the Tang. What do we mean by the Prime Minister's loss of power? Well, the Prime Minister, by his title, should lead the national government. But the Emperor took away his power and divided it up amongst his private officials, such as the Chief Secretary, the Minister of Review, and the Executive Minister. That was what happened in the Wei (AD 220–265), Jin (AD 265–420), and Northern and Southern dynasties (AD 420–589) that followed the Eastern Han (AD 25–220). Now, in the Tang Dynasty, the power of the Prime Minister was distributed among the three ministries. In other words, the Tang Emperor now put back into government hands power that had been abused by earlier Emperors.

2.1.2 Division of Power Among the Three Central Ministries

Now, let me explain the division of power among the Secretariat, the Ministry of Review, and the Executive Ministry. The Secretariat was responsible for issuing orders, including all the highest orders of the government. These orders, called imperial edicts, were issued in the name of the Emperor. All high orders concerning important government affairs must be issued by the Emperor. In reality, the Emperor did not draft the edicts in person: they were drafted by the Secretariat on his behalf. The Chief Secretary had a Deputy Chief Secretary, who in turn had seven or eight subordinate Secretaries. These were not high in position but were entitled to draft edicts for the Emperor. Most of the orders in the Secretariat were drafted by them.

In the traditional concept of Chinese politics, whether or not to follow an opinion did not depend on the majority view, as in Western democracy. Instead, it depended on whether the person proposing the opinion was considered wise or not. *Zuo's Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals*, written in the Spring and Autumn

Period, says that the opinion of the wise and virtuous should be followed. If opinion was split between two sides equal in wisdom and virtue, that of the majority side should prevail. Wisdom and virtue were a matter of quality, whereas majority was a matter of quantity. Chinese traditional politics placed greater stress on quality than quantity. The wise few could represent the majority, whereas the opinion of the majority without wisdom or virtue was of no importance.

This concept was clearly reflected in the selection system for officials in the Han Dynasty. The selection of officials for the state was not vested in the general public. It was vested in local officials. In theory, they should be able to select the wise and virtuous, because, as local officials, they should know public opinion well and should select real talent for the state. It was another matter when practice diverged from theory.

Going back to the Tang system, the Secretaries would each prepare a draft on the same issue. Then the Chief Secretary or his Deputy would pick out one, add to or edit it, and send the finalized version to the Emperor for approval. Once the Emperor signed it, the document became official and would be passed down to the Ministry of Review. We can see that in the Tang the Secretariat was in charge of issuing government orders. The Emperor only had to sign his approval.

When the Minister of Review and his Deputy received the document, they would re-examine it. The Ministry of Review also had several third-ranking officials called reviewers. Despite their lower level, they were entitled to raise comments on the Emperor's edict. If the Ministry of Review disapproved, they would write their comments on the edict and return it to the Secretariat. This was called "comment and return," meaning that the Secretariat needed to re-draft the document. In present-day terms, the Ministry of Review was in charge of countersigning the Emperor's edict. No order could become valid or passed on until countersigned by the Ministry of Review.

Once countersigned, an edict would be passed on to the Executive Ministry for implementation. The Executive Ministry was not entitled to involvement in the making of government orders.

2.1.3 Administration Hall—The Highest Central Organization

This system could be quite troublesome. When an edict drafted by the Secretariat met with disapproval from the Ministry of Review, it would be returned with comments. The work was invalidated, and even the Emperor's signing was rendered ineffective. So under the Tang system, the Ministry of Review and the Secretariat would hold a joint meeting to work on an edict. The meeting place was called Administration Hall, located initially in the Ministry of Review but later moved to the Secretariat. The Chief Secretary and his Deputy and the Minister of Review and his Deputy would all attend the meeting. The Executive Minister might or might not be asked to attend,

and if not attending he ought not to have a part in the making of the edict. Therefore, in the eyes of Tang people, the Chief Secretary and the Minister of Review were the real Prime Ministers.

Since Emperor Taizong (r. AD 627–650) was Executive Minister before he ascended the throne, no official dared to take that position thereafter. There were only two deputies, Left Deputy Executive Minister and Right Deputy Executive Minister. If they were concurrently appointed as Para-Secretary-Reviewer or Administrative Consultant, they were then entitled to attend Administration Hall meetings and were real Prime Ministers. In the early years of Tang, the Left and Right Deputy Executive Ministers both concurrently held such positions as Para-Secretary-Reviewer or Administrative Consultant and so the heads of the three ministries were all real Prime Ministers. Starting with the Kaiyuan Reign (AD 713–741), the Left and Right Executive Ministers were no longer entitled to attend Administration Hall meetings where imperial edicts were discussed and decided. They were now responsible only for executive matters. Now that they no longer held the highest positions in the government, they were not regarded as real Prime Ministers. Besides heads of the three ministries, lower-level officials who were concurrently appointed as Administrative Consultant, Para-Third-Ranking Officials, or Para-Secretary-Reviewers were also entitled to attend meetings at the Administration Hall. They were like officials without portfolio in the present-day cabinet, entitled to attend administrative meetings and to take part in deciding major state affairs. Such officials were low in rank but enjoyed long-standing reputation.

The Executive Ministry was similar to the present-day Executive Yuan (of Taiwan Province), and true to its name, responsible only for executive matters, not for decision-making. The Administration Hall was the highest government organization. The Emperor's signed edicts must also bear the chops of the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review, i.e. formally passed at the Administration Hall, before being issued to the Executive Ministry for implementation. Imperial edicts not countersigned by the two ministries were regarded as not having legal force and were therefore not recognized by lower government departments. There was a saying "how could an imperial edict come about without passing through the Phoenix Pavilions?" The "Phoenix Pavilions" referred to the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review during Empress Wu Zetian's reign (AD 690–705). It shows again that imperial edicts must pass the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review, not to mention that they were actually drafted by the Secretariat.

Chinese traditional politics had a large loophole, however. In the Tang Dynasty, there was no rule forbidding the Emperor to issue edicts without going through the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review. This was a feature of flexibility in Chinese traditional politics. More often than not, every system would allow leeway. Not all rules and regulations were rigidly fixed. That's why the Chinese Emperor was never forced onto the executioner's block like the English King. Nor was he rigorously restricted from doing certain things.

In fact, some Tang Emperors did bypass the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review in issuing edicts. "How could an imperial edict come about without passing through the Phoenix Pavilions" was a criticism directed at Empress Wu Zetian by Liu Yizhi

(AD 631–687). The remark won him the death penalty. Emperor Zhongzong, who ruled after the Empress from 705 to 710, also appointed officials without bothering the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review. Aware that such practice was somewhat erroneous and perhaps feeling a touch guilty, Zhongzong would sign the edicts in black ink, rather than in the usual red, and seal the envelopes in a slanted manner. At the time, they were called “slanted edicts in black ink,” indicating they had not gone through the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review. Executive departments needed only to take them in a perfunctory manner. But the practice was regarded as sufficiently wrong to merit recording by contemporary observers and has passed down as part of history. Those officials were somewhat looked down upon as “officials appointed with a slant.”

This example shows that the Emperor was not entitled to autocratic power in Chinese traditional politics. Nor should the Chinese be criticized for lacking a sense of law. Nevertheless, it was also a fact that all legal systems in the history of Chinese politics were set to be broken from time to time. Strictly speaking, such doings were considered rather out of order, not to be taken as the norm. As the violation of rule was not too serious—all the Emperor did was to appoint a few petty officials out of personal favor—the consequence was not significant.

Later in the Northern Song Dynasty (960–1126), the founding Emperor Taizu (r. AD 960–976) had a problem in the second year of his Qiande reign (AD 963–968). It happened that the position of the Prime Minister was left vacant following three consecutive resignations. Taizu wanted to appoint Zhao Pu (AD 922–992) as the new Prime Minister. Under normal circumstances, his edict had to be countersigned by the Prime Minister. Given the absence of a Prime Minister, how could the edict be validated for execution? So Taizu called a meeting of court officials, at which someone suggested, “During the Ganlu Incident (in AD 835), the Tang Emperor needed to appoint a new Prime Minister following the death of the previous incumbent. It was the Deputy Executive Ministers who were concurrently Administrative Consultants that put their stamp on the edict. We could follow this precedent.” Someone disagreed, “That was a flexible measure at a chaotic time. Now that the Song enjoys great peace, we should not do the same.” After repeated discussions, it was decided that the Mayor of Kaifeng should countersign it, using his official seal. Kaifeng was the capital of Northern Song. Its Mayor was like the Mayor of Nanjing, the capital of the Nationalist Government. The then Kaifeng Mayor happened to be Zhao Kuangyi (AD 939–997), Emperor Taizu’s blood younger brother, who later succeeded to the throne to become Taizong (r. AD 976–997). In this way, Taizu’s edict was legally validated.

We can see from this case that Chinese traditional politics did make a distinction between the powers of the Emperor and the powers of the Prime Minister, and that the Emperor did not wield autocratic power. Even if we call the imperial power autocratic, it was autocratic in an enlightened way. There were systems and laws; the Emperor was not given free rein to decide everything as he pleased. We should pay attention to the well-designed systems, instead of debating on the concepts of autocracy and democracy.

Attendees at meetings at the Administration Hall ranged from just two, namely the Chief Secretary and the Minister of Review, to more than a dozen or so officials from these ministries. One person was in charge of presiding over each meeting, recording and summarizing the discussions. This role, similar to that of a modern-day chief clerk, rotated among those attending for one day up to ten. He would record everyone's opinion in a comprehensive manner and was responsible for finalizing the wording. This was how, in the Tang, the role of the Prime Minister, the government leader, was performed by a presiding official in a committee.

2.1.4 The Executive Ministry and the Six Departments

All top-level state orders, once decided at the Administration Hall conferences, would be passed on to the Executive Ministry for implementation. The Executive Ministry, the largest government body, had six departments for different responsibilities: Personnel (appointing officials), Rituals (mainly religious and educational affairs), Military, Household (civil affairs and household registration), Judiciary, and Works (infrastructure construction). The Six Departments, first established in the Tang, functioned for more than 1000 years up to the late Qing Dynasty (1616–1911), with slight variations in their order of priority. At the beginning of Tang, the order was as above; Household was moved ahead of Military during Taizong's reign (AD 626–649). In the early years of the Northern Song, the order was: Personnel, Military, Judiciary, Household, Works, and Rituals. In the reform during Emperor Shenzong's reign (1067–1085), Wang Anshi (1021–1086) reordered the departments as: Personnel, Household, Rituals, Military, Judiciary, and Works. This was the order followed by later dynasties. Applicants for official positions must first pass certain exams before being appointed by the Personnel Department. While officials of the fifth rank and above were directly appointed by the Prime Ministers, the Personnel Department could propose candidates. Appointment of those below the fifth rank was entirely entrusted to the Personnel Department; the Prime Ministers would not bother about them.

The setup of the Six Departments represents huge progress compared with the Nine High Officials of the Han Dynasty. The Imperial Gateman (in charge of court attendants in the Han), for example, was very much like a private title at the imperial court. The Personnel Department, on the other hand, was a proper name matching its function. There is a similar distinction between the Han Commander of Bodyguards and the Tang Military Department. The Han's Master of Rituals was also like a title related to the Emperor's family sacrificial matters, while the Tang's Department of Rituals was a proper administrative body. Just compare the change of official titles and we can tell the tremendous progress in political concept in history. Unlike the Nine High Officials of the Han, who sounded like family stewards at the Emperor's Inner Court, the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry of the Tang were clearly government administrative organs. This was a huge step forward in Chinese political history, in system as well as in concept.

As the largest part of the Tang central government organization, the Executive Ministry also had large office buildings. These included the Executive Hall, or the head office, flanked on the left by the Personnel, Household and Rituals offices, and on the right by the Military, Judiciary and Works offices. The departments on the left were headed by the Left Deputy Executive Minister and those on the right by the Right Deputy Executive Minister. Each department was further divided into four divisions, totaling 24. The first division of each department was the head office, named after the department, such as the Personnel Division. The other divisions all had different names. The department heads all had office hours at the Executive Hall in the morning so they could discuss work conveniently and would return to their own offices in the afternoon. Officials who were also titled Administrative Consultants or Para-Secretary-Reviewers were entitled to attend meetings at the Administrative Hall. Others all worked in their own offices.

The organizational structure, appointment of officials and allocation of positions of the Executive Ministry were comprehensively recorded in the famous *Six Departments of Tang*. Written in the Tang, the book had detailed descriptions of the division of power between all the government organizations and appointment of personnel. *Six Departments of Tang* passed down in Chinese history as the canon of administrative law, religiously followed by later dynasties like the Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644) and Qing. For more than ten centuries, governments in China more or less modeled their administration according to this classic document without much change. The central governments in later times made changes only in the Secretariat and the Ministry of Review, or the order-issuing sections. The Executive Ministry, with its Six Departments, underwent little reform.

Compiled during Emperor Xuanzong's reign (AD 712–756), the *Six Departments of Tang* was compiled to reflect the realities and existing system of the time. It is different from the only other comparable canon on political systems in Chinese history, the *Rituals of Zhou*. The latter was a contemporary description of an ideal government organization in the pre-Qin-Dynasty period. It could be regarded as an ideal Constitution. Its great value lies in its systematization of political ideals without showing any trace of theorizing. It reads like a concrete, rigorous and objective record. When reading this book, we cannot but marvel at the political talent of ancient Chinese, who were capable of turning theories into concrete realities instead of limiting themselves to empty talk or fanciful thinking. Therefore, *Rituals of Zhou* should not be read as a history book representing the history of pre-Qin political systems. It is actually an important book on political theory and thinking in pre-Qin China.

In comparison, *Six Departments of Tang* was real administrative law that was actually implemented by the Tang government. It was ideal turned reality. We cannot emphasize enough the significance of the evolution from the *Rituals of Zhou* to the *Six Departments of Tang* in the history of Chinese politics. We should read *Six Departments of Tang* not just as a history book for its recording of the actual system of the Tang, but also as a book of political theory and thinking. This is because it was a detailed systemization of Tang people's political theories and thoughts. Systems must have theories and ideas behind them; no system could come into being out of

the blue. Therefore, if we neglect to look at actual political systems in China in the past, it will be pointless to talk about political thinking of the Chinese in the past.

2.1.5 Local Governments of the Tang Dynasty

Now that we have talked about the central government of the Tang, let's move on to its local governments. While the central government represented progress from the Han Dynasty, the local governments did not compare favorably. State power was gradually centralized in the Tang, the central government being weightier than local ones. Compared with Han, the Tang Dynasty had better established central government officials, while the opposite was true with local officials. In terms of local administration, the Han had the best model in Chinese history.

In Tang, the grassroots level of local government was the county, as had been the case in Han. During Xuanzong's reign, there were 1573 counties, 200-plus more than those in the Han. The local government above the level of county was the prefecture, again the same as in Han. While the Prefecture Envoy was a supervisory official in the Han, the Tang Prefecture Envoy was a high-ranking local administrator. There were 358 prefectures in Tang, more than double the Han number. The Tang counties were classified into three levels, Upper (with more than 6000 households), Medium (with between 3000 and 6000 households) and Lower (with fewer than 3000 households). The Han counties were classified into only two levels, with 10,000 households as the dividing line; the county heads of the two levels were differentiated by their titles. Obviously, the Tang counties were smaller than the Han counties. In the Tang, prefectures were also graded into three levels, with 100,000 households and 20,000 households as the respective dividing lines. They were even smaller than the Han prefectures. In the Han, there were quite a few prefectures with over a million households. From this difference alone, we can see that the Tang local officials had far less administrative power than their Han counterparts.

As for the subordinates of top local officials, the Han Prefecture Governors and County Magistrates appointed them on their own, whereas this power of appointment was centrally vested in the Personnel Department in Tang. In other words, the Tang Prefecture Governors and County Magistrates had nothing to do with the appointment of their subordinates. The local officials, because of their low ranking, could not help but thirst for promotion and were therefore not prepared to serve in their current positions for long. In response, the central government had to use promotion as an incentive by dividing up the prefectures and counties into different levels. However, even after promotion from the lower to the medium and even to the upper level, a local official still did not sense much elevation.

That was very different from the Han, where there were fewer official ranks, and where movement up and down was more flexible. Once promoted from County Magistrate to Prefecture Governor, the official was already on a par with the Nine High Officials in the central government, with the same amount of 2000 *dan* of grain as the annual salary. Under the Han system, officials were assessed every three years

and promotion or demotion was based on three assessments. Because there were few ranks and any promotion would be significant, Han officials could set their mind to work in their respective positions. Personnel changes were few and administrative efficiency was high. In the Tang, while officials enjoyed more promotions, it was not easy for those in the lower ranks to rise to the higher ranks. The outstanding division between higher- and lower-ranking officials had a great impact on administrative efficiency.

2.1.6 Supervisors and Central Commissioners

Speaking of local administration, we should touch upon the supervision system. In the Han Dynasty, the Prime Minister was the head of government, whereas the Deputy Prime Minister was in charge of supervising not just the central and local governments, but also the imperial court. We talked about this in the Han system. The Tang Dynasty had an independent Ministry of Supervision, which operated parallel to the Secretariat, the Ministry of Review and the Executive Ministry. In other words, the Ministry of Supervision was not under the Prime Ministry, a point of difference from the Han in terms of supervision.

After Emperor Zhongzong, responsibilities of the ministry were divided between the Left Minister of Supervision, who oversaw the imperial central government, and the Right Minister of Supervision, who inspected the prefectures and counties. By the nature of their duties, the Left Minister was responsible for central supervision and the Right Minister for local supervision. At the central government level, the objects of supervision were the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry. The Secretariat and the Ministry of Review were not subject to supervision. During Emperor Dezong's reign (AD 779–805), there were three Central Supervisors, each supervising two of the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry, i.e. Personnel, Rituals, Military, Works, Household, Judiciary. At the local level, the country was divided into ten Regions, each under the surveillance of a Local Supervisor, to "supervise local administration."

Back in the Han Dynasty, the Prefecture Envoy was supposed to inspect six aspects of local work and not to exceed that limitation. In the Tang, on the other hand, while the Local Supervisors were central officials, they actually stayed locally and functioned as local officials superior to the top local administrators. With local administrative power in their hands, they were naturally in a higher position than the original top local officials. Let me take our present system for example. The Ministry of Education sends an education inspector to observe the work of several universities. Certainly, his position is not comparable to that of the university presidents and his authority is limited to supervising designated areas of work within the universities. Suppose we are in the Tang, the education inspector will be stationed locally and all the university presidents there will have to follow his direction in their internal administration. Such a system will certainly weaken the position of the university presidents and such was the case with the Local Supervisors in the Tang. Their orig-

inal duty was to supervise local work, but they gradually became the de facto heads of local administration, pushing the local officials into an inferior position.

As a result, they became the top tier above the original two-tier local administration, which was improper both in title and in practice. It was a type of centralization of power, extremely harmful to local administration. When Local Supervisors stayed on in frontier regions and were given full power by the central government to deal with contingencies, they became Central Commissioners. Their plenipotentiary power was signified by a special banner or a token issued by the central government. Central Commissioners were authorized to direct not only military affairs, but also financial affairs, even personnel appointment. The areas under their supervision thus evolved into Military Zones. As more military personnel were promoted as Central Commissioners to border areas, the country fell into their separate control.

The central government had intended to concentrate power through the Central Commissioners, but actually ended in losing control over them. It was a repetition of the situation in the late Eastern Han, when the Prefecture Governors diverted power from the central government. This situation produced the Rebellion of An Lushan (AD 703–757) and Shi Siming (AD 703–761) from AD 755 to AD 763, after which divided control became even more entrenched. The plenipotentiary supervisors, originally sent by the central government to strengthen central power, turned against and eventually toppled the Tang Dynasty.

The Qing Dynasty had a similar experience. The highest local official in the Qing was the Regional Administrative Commissioner, just like his counterpart of today. The General Governors and the Regional Supervisors, originally sent by the central government as imperial envoys to take charge of local military affairs only temporarily, stayed on locally and exercised higher authority than the Regional Administrative Commissioners. In this way, the central government actually kept local power in its own hands. Eventually, however, those General Governors and Regional Supervisors became so powerful that they refused to obey the central government, which then dissolved as a matter of course. The division of central and local power was a major principle in the history of Chinese politics. As a large country with a large population, China must remain united, but power should not be over-centralized. This is a major subject that should be treated carefully in Chinese politics.

Reverting to the subject of the Tang, its central administration seemed more advanced than that of the Han, but its local administration compared unfavorably. That the supervisors from the central government became local administrators was a serious shortcoming. It was even worse that military chiefs should act as top local administrators. This system was to blame for the demise of the Tang Dynasty.

2.2 Imperial Examination for Selecting Officials in the Tang Dynasty

2.2.1 *Nine-Rank System in the Wei, Jin, and the Northern and Southern Dynasties*

In the previous lecture, we talked about the Han system for selecting officials. By Tang times, the system was already completely replaced by an examination system. The two Chinese characters for “examination” respectively mean “examination” and “probation.” Far back in the late Warring States Period (475–221 BC), many utopians were already advocating objective standards for government officials, such as selecting candidates from the wise and the able, examining them before appointment, and checking the performance of officials. The Han official-selecting system was based on their idea. The Tang imperial examination system was the evolution of the Han official-selecting system.

In the Han Dynasty, candidates were recommended by localities and then examined by the central government. Back then, the examination just took the form of question and answer. Not until the later years of the Eastern Han Dynasty was a formal examination established by Zuo Xiong (?–138), who was then the Imperial Secretary. And it was only part of the selecting system. At the end of Eastern Han, the empire fell into chaos. With the flight of Emperor Xian (r. AD 190–220) from the capital, the central government lost contact with the localities. All the official systems fell apart, the official-selecting system being no exception. The court now had no standard at all for appointing officials. The military, in particular, appointed officers indiscriminately.

When Cao Cao (AD 155–220) was in power, heading Wei, one of the Three Kingdoms (AD 220–280) after the fall of the Han Dynasty, he¹ appointed Chen Qun (AD ?–237) as the Imperial Secretary in charge of the Ministry of Personnel. Chen initiated the system of Nine-Rank System. Roughly speaking, each and every prefecture recommended a Personnel Director, from among the reputable central government officials. The Personnel Director had deputies to assist him. The central government issued them with a talent survey form. The Personnel Directors completed the forms, which divided talent into nine ranks: upper upper, upper medium, upper lower; medium upper, medium medium, medium lower; lower upper, lower medium, lower lower. All the potential candidates who had followed the central government were eligible for entry, whether they already held an official position or had never been in office. The form included such details as age, place of birth, possible ranks, and comments by the Personnel Director, who was also known as Personnel Director for Nine Ranks. The forms would be double-checked by the Personnel Directors, with the assistance of their deputies, and then submitted to the Ministry of Personnel, which would use the information as reference for the appointment, promotion or demotion of officials.

¹According to *Cihai*, it was Cao Cao's son Cao Pi who appointed Chen Qun.

In this manner, the appointment, promotion and demotion of officials followed certain objective standards, which, like the selection system of the Han Dynasty, were based on public opinion. In contrast to the modern democratic election system in the West, which valued the opinions of the majority, the selection of officials in the Han and Tang took the opinions of the virtuous. According to traditional Chinese concepts, the virtuous could represent the views of the masses. This was the theory. It was another matter that some of the virtuous might not be virtuous and some of the upright might not be upright. The Nine-Rank system was much better than the random appointment of officials based on private considerations, as was the situation when the system was initiated. Its application by the Cao family in the Wei Kingdom helped clean up the style and evaluation of officials. It also helped the Cao family to strengthen their rule.

The Nine-Rank system, however, was only a provisional measure. It was like medicine for a particular illness. Once the illness is cured, the medicine should no longer be administered; otherwise it will cause illness. After the whole country was reunited under the Jin Dynasty and down to the Southern and Northern Dynasties, the system invented by Chen Qun was continued without revision, only to become the cause of problems.

Firstly, all those aspiring to official positions swarmed to the central government, where the Personnel Directors were based. It was not a good thing for talent from all over the country to concentrate in the central government. That way the localities suffered brain drain, resulting in low-efficiency local administration and backward local customs and culture. How could the central government survive when local administration had collapsed? That's why centralization of power was not a good thing, nor was centralization of talent.

Secondly, the promotion and demotion of officials or appointment of candidates depended on recommendations and comments from Personnel Directors. It was a muddled conflation of performance evaluation and official selection, where superiors didn't have the authority to evaluate officials under them. As a result, the officials were preoccupied with pursuing social prestige, to the neglect of their duties and actual work. Their direct superiors could not do anything about them. Why, then, did Chen Qun require that the Personnel Directors must be concurrently high-ranking officials of the central government? It was because at the time the central government had lost connection with the localities. By concurrently holding both positions, the Personnel Directors were able to recommend candidates from their home areas for the central government. Why were the Personnel Directors asked to evaluate those already in official positions (besides recommending new candidates)? Because by doing so they could eliminate the large number of officials appointed without qualification. Such considerations were painstakingly thought through by Chen Qun when he designed the scheme. Therefore, the Nine-Rank system, as a provisional measure, was not a bad system. It became problematic only when both the times and realities had changed.

We can see that a system must be made and constantly adapted to suit reality. It is impossible for a system to remain unchanged for 20 or 30 years, still less for 200 or 300 years. What can remain unchanged is the original spirit, that is, the main

purpose behind a system. Only in this way can a system evolve along its normal track. This should be the natural development of a system. A system must develop in accordance with the environment and requirements of reality. It should be born out of reality rather than of theory. A system born out of reality has its own theory and spirit. While theory is the spiritual life of a system, reality is the blood that nourishes it. Both are indispensable. For example, most of the Tang systems evolved from the historical sources and traditional spirit of the Southern and Northern Dynasties.

Today, however, we want to sever history and imitate foreign systems. Even when we know they are not compatible with reality, we want to overturn reality to suit those systems, in the name of revolution. Actually, the nature of revolution is to overturn existing systems to suit reality, not the other way round. What we do now is negating all the theories behind traditional systems and at the same time neglecting all the real needs in the real environment. Therefore, our theories lack respect for reality; the systems we want to have are unrealistic. We should guard against this tendency if we are willing to learn from historical lessons. Under the rule of the Cao family, the Nine-Rank System worked well; it became problematic when later dynasties followed it rigidly. It is not fair for later generations to blame the system itself.

2.2.2 Selection System of the Tang Dynasty

There should be constraints on changes of a system. It should not be changed at will. What matters is to discover the unchanging origin amid the dynamic of system evolution. The origin is what we call historical tradition. The longer-standing the tradition is, the more reliable, or vital, is its origin. In Chinese politics of the past, things would go wrong when the power of the Prime Minister was given to the Emperor; things would go wrong when there was no objective standard for the appointment of officials. The traditional spirit of such systems was not absent from the Nine-Rank system, designed to set objective standards for the appointment of officials. Later on, however, the standards became limited to those from a small number of families with prestigious social status. And that was grossly wrong.

The Tang Dynasty tackled the problem by allowing free competition for selection, or “recommending oneself through personal credentials.” There was no need for recommendation by local officials, still less evaluation by Personnel Directors of the central government. Almost everyone was eligible to register with their respective local governments to take examinations offered by the central government. This system, in general, represented an advance on previous arrangements. In the Han Dynasty, merchants were not allowed to take up official positions, and nor could officials engage in commerce. Local governments were responsible for selecting candidates for official positions. It was the same under Tang. Merchants and artisans were not allowed to register for self-recommendation, as their professions were for private profit. Candidates were expected to concentrate on public service. This

limitation was called “clean family background,” which naturally also meant no criminal record.

Aside from this, there was no other limitation. Local officials would submit the applicants’ registrations to the central government. Once they passed the examination organized by the Department of Rituals under the Executive Ministry, the applicants became Qualified Candidates. As for specific positions, they needed to take a further examination organized by the Department of Personnel, also under the Executive Ministry. In general, the Department of Rituals tested them on knowledge while the Department of Personnel tested ability, such as the ability to present themselves and to write official documents. The Department of Rituals offered examinations in different categories, such as Confucian classics, treatise on a quotation from a Confucian classic, poetry, and political essay. This examination system for selecting officials was retained from Tang times down to the Qing Dynasty. Even the Constitution of the Republic of China (1912–1949) founded by Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) included the right to take the public-service examination as one of the five basic rights.

In theory, there was nothing wrong with the system itself, but it became problematic later on. Even so, we should not obliterate its merits altogether, as do those who question why the government did not use a democratic ballot to elect officials. As a matter of fact, the election and ballot system of the West in modern times has its own problems. It is most unreasonable to criticize an old system from more than a thousand years ago on the basis of a modern system. In the so-called democratic politics in the West today, only the top executive leader, such as the President or the Prime Minister, is elected by public vote. There are no criteria for the appointment of other officials. Is this not a problem? Therefore, the West borrowed the Chinese examination system to establish their own method of appointing civil servants. In China, we used examination instead of election to select officials. In *Laws and Regulations Since Ancient Times* by Du You of the Tang Dynasty, the first part is *Land and Finance* and the second part is about selection of officials. While the Han Dynasty chose officials through a selection system, the Tang adopted an examination system. We can see that in Chinese political traditions, examination and selection had the same intention and function. The democratic politics of the West today is the politics of political parties. While political officials are selected from within a party, public servants are selected through examination, without party discrimination. This ensures that public service is not disrupted when political officials change.

In China, appointment of officials was based on examination and evaluation of their qualifications. There were certain objective standards. Even the Prime Minister had to have certain credentials and there were certain requirements on his appointment. Not even the Emperor could appoint Prime Minister as he pleased. Thus, law mattered more than the Emperor, who must follow the unwritten rules of his time to select his Prime Minister. As long as the Emperor did not break the conventional law, he could act without consulting his court officials. We cannot describe the examination and evaluation system as worthless. It is still less reasonable to regard the system as obscurant or as a tool to serve the Emperor’s selfish intentions. We should understand that a system cannot work as a system if it can be established according to the selfish wishes of a small handful. How absurdly unreasonable to criticize the

system as devised by selfish Emperors to cheat the people, enabling them to maintain autocratic rule for several centuries! How could such a thing ever happen anywhere or anytime, in China or abroad, in ancient times or at present? If the people were so easily cheated, we would have no reason to promote democratic politics.

In reality, the examination system for selecting officials opened the doors of state power. This was the internal significance and spiritual lifeblood of the system. The selection of officials (based on recommendation by local officials) in the Han Dynasty opened the doors to people other than feudal aristocrats; the open competition for official positions in the Tang Dynasty opened the doors to people other than those from privileged families. The Tang system was more open and free than the Han system. On this point, we can say that it was political progress. At that time, children from poor families had no proper place to study for the imperial examination. They often had to borrow a space in Buddhist temples or Daoist monasteries to study. Wang Bo (AD 759–830) was one such example and he rose as high as Prime Minister in his official career. While he studied at a Buddhist temple, he also shared meals with the monks. The monks were not pleased with his protracted stay and would sometimes sound the meal bell after they had finished eating. That was the origin of the idiom “after-meal bell.”

Still, the Tang official selection system had its own problems. Let me take just one example. While the number of recruits was limited, there was no limitation on the number of applicants. As the number of applicants kept growing, the number of recruits had to be increased gradually. Of all the scholars throughout the country, there were always more applicants than those who were actually appointed officials. To deal with the situation, the government had no alternative but to extend its organizations. Tang’s 300-year policy of open doors to officialdom generated the establishment of all sorts of semi-official positions, such as supernumerary officials and officials-in-waiting. It was said that there were ten times more scholars than officials, ten times more applicants than scholars, insufficient official positions for scholars, officials were underpaid, and clerks in government offices fleeced the people. That was a serious drawback of the open doors to government. It still exists today.

We should be aware that the democratic revolution of the West in modern times happened because the doors to government were not open. In China, on the other hand, the pernicious influence of access to government started with the Tang Dynasty and was followed by later dynasties. The practice was like adding water to stop a flood or adding fuel to stop a fire. The medicine was not suitable for the illness; it exacerbated it. To solve this problem accumulated over the years, China should have encouraged scholars to divert their talent from the officialdom road to the road of industry and commerce. The result would have been capitalism.

In the West, politics was not open to society until the emergence of a middle-class society and the rise of industrial and commercial capitalism. In China, the government was open to the whole country ever since the Han Dynasty. Scholars were always encouraged to join the ranks of officialdom whereas handicraft business and commercial capitalism were always oppressed. The government encouraged people to become great scholars and then to become high officials. It did not encourage the people to make money, to become rich merchants. In general, the traditional policy

in Chinese history was to limit capitalism and to equalize land ownership. Such a political policy discouraged the people from applying their talent to expanding private wealth. For this reason, scholars were hell bent on official careers. Government overstaffing became a political sickness. Scholars became a political burden. If they were further encouraged to revolt and to seize power, what a mess there would be! Obviously, any system has both merits and demerits. Our traditional politics should not be dismissed as autocratic and dark, unreasonable and lawless. All reasonable, lawful systems must be improved continuously so as to develop continuously.

2.3 The Economic System of the Tang Dynasty

2.3.1 *The Tri-Tax System in the Tang Dynasty*

Let's now talk about the economic system of the Tang, first mainly about the tax system, as before. There were three types of tax. The first was grain tax, levied on the land distributed by the government. The farmer paid a tax on the land, which he had to return to the government in old age. It was an equal land system inherited from the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 386–534). Under the Nine-Square System in ancient times, the land was also equally distributed to farmers for rent but was owned by aristocrats. In the Tang Dynasty, the land belonged to the central government, i.e. the state. In both cases, the land was equally distributed to farmers, but the local governments of prefectures and counties in the Tang were different from the ancient feudal social system. The rate of land tax in Tang was one-fortieth, even lighter than the one-thirtieth rate during the Han Dynasty. The second type was labor tax. Each man must work for the state for 20 days in every year, which was again lighter than the 30-day labor tax in the Han Dynasty. The third type was textile tax, including local products, mainly silk and flax fabrics. The three types of tax were mentioned earlier in the writings of Mencius (c. 372–289 BC).

Since China was an agrarian country, the people naturally made their living from the land. The Tang tax system was meant for everybody to have land so that they could pay grain tax to the state. Those who tilled the land were naturally men in their prime. These men were able to labor for the state in their spare time. Farmers with land naturally had families. The family handcraft business in an agrarian society mainly produced silk and flax textiles. The state was not imposing an over-heavy burden by charging part of their products. All the three types of tax in the Tang were generally lighter than those in the Han. It could be regarded as a light taxation system. The three were clearly distinguished. The grain tax was levied on the land. The labor tax was levied on the farmer. The textile tax was levied on the family. The most important intention of the system was to ensure that farmers must have both land and a family. They would then find the light taxes levied by the government bearable. This was the advantage the Tang tax system had over that of the Han.

2.3.2 Household and Farmhand Registration of the Tang Dynasty

This system, starting from the equal-land system of the Northern Wei, did not last for long, nor was it implemented to the letter. From the Northern Dynasties (AD 386–581) to the early Tang, there were always rich families in all parts of the country who owned large areas of land. Even this imperfect equal-land system did not last for long. It became thoroughly corrupted after a period of time.

Historically, implementation of the Tri-tax (grain, labor and textile) System depended on the accurate registration of households and farmhands, which was the case in the early Tang Dynasty. Registration began at the birth of a child and lasted through adulthood until death. Households were divided into nine ranks, based on the economic situations of different parts of the country. Household registration books had three identical copies, respectively kept by the county, the prefecture, and the Household Department (under the Executive Ministry). Household registration was the basis for grain and textile taxes. Farmhand registration kept records of farmhands in their prime, the basis for labor tax. The amount of labor tax was calculated on farmhand registration of the previous year. Farmhand registration was renewed each year, household registration every three years. Renewals were retained for comparison with records of the previous years. In the Tang, prefectures and counties would keep five renewals, the Household Department three renewals. Thus the local governments were able to check household and farmhand registration over a period of 15 years, the Household Department nine years.

The registration was cumbersome work. All changes had to be registered, such as change in family members, distribution and return of farmland, respectively at the age of 18 and 60. In such a large country, the frequent, regular investigation, registration, renewal, and proofreading of records required meticulous care. Such work was sustainable only when the willing spirit existed. As the Tang Dynasty soon entered a period of peace, stability, and prosperity, there was some slackening off in the work. People might think that small loopholes did not matter much, loopholes such as a farmer over 60 not being taken off the registration books or a young man reaching adulthood not being added to them, or a farmer receiving land in the name of someone else. Neglect or sloppiness like the above were unavoidable and became the main cause for the failure of the Tri-tax System of the Tang Dynasty. It did not take long as there were too many households and too little land for distribution. The failure was the result of slackening in implementation of regulations. It was a failure of administration, not to mention that large, powerful privileged local households would resort to fraud in order to obstruct implementation of the system.

What happened to the household and farmhand registration system shows that the implementation and continuation of any system needed a corresponding moral will and loyal service. Otherwise no law, no matter how sound or well-intentioned, could function well. Besides, one system would inevitably influence and be influenced by other systems. Therefore, no system could be established on its own or stand alone. The household and farmhand registration system was quite similar to

the modern-day planned economy. It was meant to plan for all the people of the country, every family and every farmhand. Large-scale registration would be difficult even in modern times, despite scientific statistics, convenient transportation and information, and easy printing. In ancient times, inconvenient transportation, simple government, expensive paper, and inconvenient writing were all big problems for registration. Under such circumstances, the household and farmhand registration gradually became messy and ultimately impractical. The Two-season Taxation System came into being out of necessity. The Tri-tax System ended the economic tradition of equal distribution of land, based on the Nine-Square Land System in ancient times. The Two-season Taxation System was to bring about a free economy.

2.3.3 Two-Season Taxation System of the Tang Dynasty

This system was initiated by Yang Yan (AD 727–781), the minister in charge of financial affairs in AD 780, during Emperor Dezong's reign. Since then, land taxation in China has more or less followed the system. Land tax was collected twice a year, in summer and autumn, hence the term. Its difference from the Tri-tax System was that, in Tang people's words, "residents are registered without regard to their being a native or non-native." Suppose you were a native of Jiangsu Province and moved to Hubei Province, you would join the Hubei household registration. What counted was your current place of residence rather than your original place of residence. In this way, migration of population became free. The Two-season Taxation was based on the amount of land, rather than the number of farmhands of a household. This rule freed farmers from doing labor for the government. We must say it was a good point of the system.

Now that the government no longer distributed land to the farmers, land transaction among the people became free. The Two-season Taxation System put an end to the traditional equal allocation of land that had existed since ancient times. This freedom in land transaction lasted up to the Qing Dynasty. Compared with the ancient system, it had its own drawbacks. According to contemporary commentators, the grain, labor and textile taxes were clearly distinguished. Now that they were taxed under one category, the procedure was simplified (which in itself was a good thing). As time went by, however, the government ignored the background and levied labor and other taxes whenever such needs arose. As such taxes had already been calculated into the Two-season Taxation, the additions meant more taxes. This was the problem of convergence of tax categories.

A more serious problem with the Two-season Taxation system concerned the rate of taxation. Land taxation in Chinese history, from the Nine-Square Land System down to the Tri-tax System, always had a unified rate set by the government across the entire country. For example, the rate was one-thirtieth in the Han Dynasty and one-fortieth in the early Tang. In both cases, the rate was the same everywhere in the country. The Two-season Taxation System did not have a fixed rate.

By setting the tax rate based on the amount of land, the early Tang taxation system was budgeting expenditure on the basis of revenues. The Two-season Taxation System, by contrast, was like budgeting revenues on the basis of expenditure. When Yang Yan designed the system, he set the standard at the amount of land taxation of the previous year, that is AD 779, during Emperor Daizong's reign (AD 762–779). In this way, the government taxation procedure was simplified. It did not need to trouble itself with annual investigations and registrations of land and households. However, it created more trouble than it saved. Under the Two-season Taxation System, taxes were levied at will. There was no longer a fixed amount and rate of taxes.

Let me explain the situation with a specific example. A report submitted by Li Bo (773–831) to the throne states: Your servant has traveled to different places to investigate problems. I have learned that there used to be 400 households in Changyuan Township of Weinan County (in present-day Shaanxi Province); there are only a few more than 100. There used to be 3000 households in Wenxiang County, there are now only 1000. Other prefectures and counties are about the same. After looking into the situation, I have found that the absent households have run away to escape taxes. If five out of ten households have run away, the remaining five have to pay the taxes of ten. Like a stone thrown into a well, the situation is going to deteriorate till the bottom.

The reason is that the Two-season Taxation System was initiated when the registration of land and households became messy. Instead of clearing it up, the central government just set the amount of new tax by the standard of a certain year and required local governments to collect the same amount every year. If the households in a place decreased for one reason or another, leaving some land uncultivated, the local government would levy the entire amount of tax on the remaining farming households. As a result, poor areas had to bear heavier taxes, such as five households bearing the burden of ten, a situation as described in Li Bo's report. These five households had their taxes doubled out of the blue. The people there became poorer and were compelled to run away as well. Eventually there might be only one or two households to bear the taxes for ten. In the end they would inevitably be bankrupted, leaving no one to till the land.

Rich places, on the other hand, would attract more residents, who helped expand farmland. Since the amount of taxes was already fixed, each household would pay a lighter average. The difference in land taxes between different places grew larger as time went by, with the rich becoming richer and the poor becoming poorer. This was how the Two-season Taxation System seriously affected local economies of the country, leading to extreme disparity between rich and poor areas. Later on, the Two-season Taxation System required adjustment of the amount of taxes every three years, by decree of the Emperor. On the whole, the fact remained that there was no more unified land tax across the country after the Two-season Taxation System came in.

The two-season taxes were paid in cash instead of grain. Farmers had to sell their grain for cash in order to pay tax. This gave merchants the chance to make profits, but cost the farmers a great deal. Let me cite Lu Zhi's (AD 754–805) report: The

amount of taxes was calculated in cash. Farmers could pay silk in lieu of cash. In the past, a roll of silk had been equivalent to 3200–3300 pieces of cash. Now a roll of silk was only equivalent to 1500 cash. The loss was more than doubled. Li Ao (AD 772–841) also noted the depreciation in the value of silk in the 40 years since the introduction of the Two-season Taxation System. At the beginning, a roll of silk was worth 4000 cash and one *dou* (= 10 L) of grain was worth 200 cash. If a farming family was liable to tax of 10,000 cash, they needed to pay two and a half rolls of silk. Today, a roll of silk was worth only 800 cash and a *dou* of grain was worth only 50 cash. If a farming family still had to pay tax of 10,000 cash, they had to pay 12 rolls of silk. When they were pressed for money, what could they do but sell their grain at discount? Even if the tax officer overvalued the price of silk, the family still had to pay eight rolls, triple the amount in 780, the first year of the Jianzhong reign (AD 780–783), when the system was initiated.

Since the Two-season Taxation System came in, land tax paid in the form of cash has remained up to the present day. The point is that the government sacrificed the economic ideal of equal distribution of land, a tradition passed down from history, for the convenience of revenues, expenses, and tax collection. Since then, the government liberated the transaction of farmland, but lost the spirit to ensure that the people had land enough to make a living. The result was the takeover of land, and inequality between the rich and the poor. Farmers did not have their own land, while landlords were free to exploit them.

On the whole, the change from the Tri-tax System to the Two-season Taxation System was the most fundamental change in land taxation in Chinese history. It is one of the most important subjects in the study of the economic history and land systems of the country. The Two-season Taxation System marked the end of the first half of land-taxation history. The second half followed the Two-season Taxation System, with only minor revisions. The change may not have been an inevitable historical trend. The radical change took place because of various temptations and pressures. In Chinese history, the economy and the culture were always countryside-based, not city-based. The pre-Qin feudal aristocracy as well as the pre-Tang wealthy and privileged families used to have land and influence, but such families lost both from the mid-Tang downward. By contrast, urban handicraft business and commercial capital, in the tradition of Chinese history, were never a mainstay of Chinese culture. Under the Two-season Taxation System, scholars could return to the country to become small landlords. Thanks to their presence, the small-scale economic centers provided nourishment for rural culture. If the mid-Tang Dynasty had strictly followed the system of allocating land to adults and taking it back upon their old age, scholars would have been forced to leave the countryside and Chinese culture would have undergone dramatic change. This explains why the Two-season Taxation System could persist right up to the end of the Qing Dynasty.

2.3.4 Comparison Between the Han and the Tang Economic and Financial Systems

We find contrasts when comparing the Han and the Tang economic and financial systems. The Salt and Iron Policy adopted by Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC) of the Han Dynasty was an economic curb on capitalism so that the people could not accumulate too much wealth. At the same time, however, the government did not pay attention to the poor at the lower stratum of society. Even though the land tax in the Han Dynasty was light, it did not bring much profit to the farmers. There were still many poor people and some of them were forced to make a living as slaves. The government's low tax policy benefited the landlord class most.

The economic policy of the Tang Dynasty, on the other hand, was intended to keep the people above poverty. The essential spirit of the Tri-tax System was not only to lighten taxation, but also to ensure that the people owned property. The government did not put restrictions on rich people. At the beginning, commerce was free and there was no commercial tax. As for the poor, the government would allocate land to everyone so that they could enjoy a life above average.

Simply put, the Han Dynasty curbed capitalism among the upper classes of society while failing to take care of the lower classes. The Tang Dynasty planned for and distributed land to people in the lower social strata while allowing the rich people of the upper classes to develop freely. The contrast puts the Tang in a wiser light than the Han, as the former government allowed for private wealth and at the same time prevented poverty among the people. It was quite like the modern free economy of Britain and the United States. The Han government seemed lacking in such wisdom. It prevented the people from getting too rich, but failed to prevent the people of the lower classes from falling into poverty. This shows the difference in economic ideals of the two dynasties. But the difference was only in early Tang. With the collapse of the Tri-tax System and the initiation of the Two-season Taxation System, more taxes were levied, as those on trade in tea and salt. The situation became similar to that in the Han.

The Salt and Iron Policy of Emperor Wu was intended to finance his expeditions against the Huns. The breakdown of the Tri-tax System and the introduction of new taxes such as those on tea and salt under Emperor Xuanzong were to finance territorial expansion. In Emperor Dezong's reign, army mutinies during outward expansion led to frequent civil wars, and the economic system had to be changed to suit the new situation. In both the Han and Tang dynasties, it was military disaster that led to change in economic policy.

2.4 The Military System of the Tang Dynasty

Before Tang, the military system in China involved the entire nation, and all farmers were soldiers. In modern terms, it was a close combination of social economy and national defense. The Tang military system also combined the military and farming, but in a different way. Let me put it this way: there were two types of military-farming combination, the Han style and the Tang style. In the Han Dynasty, farmers were at the same time soldiers, or all farmers were soldiers. National defense depended on the production groups of farmers. The farming groups were also military groups.

In the Tang Dynasty, soldiers were at the same time farmers. Military groups were also production groups, but the converse was not the case. All soldiers were farmers, but not all farmers were soldiers. Military groups were responsible for farming, every soldier must till the land, but not every farmer had to serve in the army. The system was initiated by Su Chuo (AD 498–546) of the Northern Zhou Dynasty (AD 557–581). The Tang Dynasty simply followed it.

In historical terms, the Tang system was better than the Han system, because it was not necessary for all farmers to serve in the military, given the huge number of households and the large size of the country. When all farmers were soldiers, the level of training needed did not match their sheer numbers. When all the soldiers also tilled the land like farmers, the government did not have to supply their needs. The system worked well as long as the soldiers were all farmers who provided for themselves, instead of having nothing to do. They were called garrison soldiers.

The term garrison soldier had to do with the structure of local government of the Tang. As I have discussed before, the Tang had two levels of local government, the prefecture and, under it, the county. They were responsible for local administration. The garrison was a military zone, apart from either a prefecture or a county. It is comparable to Taipei City or Taipei County having a military zone that is not part of the city or county. There were three levels of garrison. The upper garrison had 1200 soldiers, the medium 1000, and the lower 800.

Where did the soldiers come from? Back then, households were divided into nine ranks, based on the property of each family. This detail is worthy of our attention as it represents the sophistication of politics at the time. Just imagine, more than 1000 years ago, what meticulous work it was to register clearly all the households in the country and to divide them into nine ranks according to their respective economic conditions. The law did not permit men from the lower three ranks to join the army. Only those from the upper- and medium-ranking families could volunteer and be selected by the government to join the army. Military families were exempt from the Tri-tax (grain, labor and textile). Apart from this benefit given by the state, the soldiers were not paid for their service. They needed to prepare or purchase their own arms and other items as well. When men from 1200 eligible families were gathered, they formed an upper garrison, like today's military region. Garrisons were usually established in areas of military importance, recruiting soldiers from eligible households.

The number of garrisons varied from time to time. There were 600–800 garrisons in the Tang Dynasty. If there were 800 garrisons and all of them were of medium size, there should be 800,000 troops, or 400,000 at the very least. These 400,000–800,000 troops supported themselves by farming, without receiving supplies from the state either in the form of money or grain. They defended the country while sustaining themselves by farming. One third of the garrisons, or perhaps 300, were stationed near the central government, seated in Chang'an (present-day Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi Province), west of the Hangu Pass. The other two thirds, or 400–600 garrisons, were distributed across the country, with more in Shanxi and other frontier regions. Other areas had fewer garrisons. Some prefectures might have one garrison apiece, while some might have none.

The legal age for military service was 20 and every soldier was required to serve at a central-government garrison for a year, stationed at his local garrison during the rest of his term. The soldiers did farm work most of the time and trained during slack seasons. Their service at the capital was similar to that in the Han Dynasty, only the Han soldiers performed their service at their local places,² while the Tang soldiers took turns to serve at the capital. Soldiers based 250 km away from the capital had to be divided into five groups, 500 km seven groups, 750 km eight groups, 1000 km ten groups, and 1000-plus km 12 groups. In other words, soldiers 250 km away from the capital made two round trips and those 1000 away made one round trip during about the same period of time. The same equivalence can be made between soldiers 750 km away making three round trips and those more than 1000 km away making two. By this arrangement, the soldiers contributed the same amount of service. In times of war, soldiers would be called to arms from across the country, regardless of their service points. This was the arrangement for the soldiers.

What about the officers? There were 16 imperial garrisons under the direct command of the central government. Each had its own name and was under the command of a Grand General, who would lead the troops to battle in wartime. When the war ended, soldiers would return to their local garrisons and officers to their respective imperial garrisons. A Garrison Commander was responsible for training the soldiers in local places in times of peace. The Tang Dynasty sustained its army without paying soldiers either in cash or grain, as I have discussed. As for officers, they were not supposed to get involved in politics. They did not command troops, either, except during wartime. Officers were awarded military honors for their wartime feats. Just as civil officials had different ranks, military officers won different ranks of honor. Therefore, military officers were also called officers of honor. They enjoyed honors without holding actual positions. The highest honor was to remain at the court as Grand General, but most of them would return home as farmers. Of course, they also enjoyed certain benefits from the state and society because of their honors. The benefits might be financial or honorary. Military honors also had different ranks, as the 12 ranks of honors mentioned in the *Ballad of Mulan*. Possessing honors but not actual power, military officers enjoyed their honors without interfering with politics.

²Actually, the Han soldiers also performed services at different locations, as mentioned by the author in Lecture I.

By depending on this military system to rule the country and expand abroad, China became the most powerful country in the world during the Tang Dynasty.

Later on, the military system failed. How did this happen? It was not that the system was no longer needed: the system collapsed because of personnel slackening. The first cause had to do with the rotation of service at the capital. These soldiers all came from well-to-do families and led a comfortable life, because youths from poor families were not allowed to join the army. During Emperor Taizong's reign, he would sometimes practice archery with the soldiers on rotation duty in the imperial palace. Enjoying government esteem, such soldiers were proud of themselves, but later on, as the country enjoyed peace, the tens of thousands of soldiers on rotation in the capital had nothing to do. The Emperor no longer paid attention to them, either. Under such circumstances, the soldiers were sometimes "borrowed" by a minister who needed manpower to build a garden or by an imperial relative who wanted to build a house. Downgraded as mere laborers, the soldiers were looked down on, and when their next tour of duty came up, they would run off to escape the duty.

The second cause had to do with logistics. In the early years of Tang, when soldiers died in war, the army would immediately report their names to the central government. The latter would immediately give orders to local governments to arrange awards for the families of the deceased, such as personal visits by officials to the families, honors and pensions. All these would be taken good care of even before the remains of the deceased were carried home. Matters like this were of utmost importance to military morale. Proper arrangements meant boundless encouragement. Western countries do this in modern times, but China was already doing so as early as the Tang Dynasty. Later on, however, both the army and the government got sloppy on such matters. When soldiers died, their death might not be immediately reported to the central government, which in turn might not immediately transmit the news to local governments, which might fail to send people to convey condolences. While the government was delaying, word of the deaths had already reached their families through private channels. Even after the war had finished and troops had returned home, government envoys might still not appear. Families of the deceased naturally felt that their men had died in vain. Gradually they lost faith in the government.

Army officers also became unhappy. Unlike civil officials, who had actual administrative positions, army officers had only honors. That means they were not much different from ordinary soldiers. Government officials in high positions even required them to do manual labor. In such cases, their honors seemed to have brought them humiliation instead. To be addressed as lieutenant or colonel was actually a jibe rather than respectful. Now that the honors of the army officers were looked down on, the status of army men declined.

Things became worse as time went on. With the government determined to expand its territory, more troops were needed to defend the frontier. Formerly, soldiers would retire to their local garrisons after battle, but they were now required to remain at the frontier. Whereas soldiers took turns to guard the frontier before, they were now required to stay longer, because replacements were slow in coming. When the second batch failed to arrive, the first batch had to stay on against their wishes. Their return date could be postponed for years.

As I mentioned earlier, the soldiers all came from well-to-do families. Their clothes, horses and arms were all prepared by themselves. That they were able to do so was because their families were exempted from land tax and labor tax. Their clothes were tailor-made to fit, their arms suited their individual physical strength, they understood their horses and vice versa. These were guarantees for their life as well as enabling them to win honors in battle. Therefore, the soldiers all had fine armor, weapons and horses. And this is why Tang troops were invincible. In addition to the above, the soldiers would all bring money, in case government allowances were not enough.³ In the Tang Dynasty, silk was used as cash, so the soldiers would bring rolls of silk with them. When they arrived at the frontier, the garrison officers would tell them: leave your silk with me to keep in the warehouse and you can take it when you need it. Then the officers would make the soldiers do hard labor and for way longer than they were required to. They made life so difficult for the soldiers that they could not eat or sleep well. Their purpose was to drive them to an early death in order to appropriate their property. Such matters went unrecorded in official histories, but can be found in fragmentary documents. It was because of many such things that the Tang military system collapsed.

The Tang poet Du Fu (AD 712–770) wrote these lines on the plight of soldiers, “They left for the northern frontier at fifteen, /Then for the western frontier at forty. /They had barely reached adulthood when first leaving home, /And would be called back to the frontier when they returned home in white hair.” The poem describes how soldiers had no retirement nor rest. For fear of being sent to the frontier, soldiers would preemptively desert their local garrison. Their departure left their families uncared for and their land unworked, and they remained childless. Even with the rear depleted of human resources for the army, the government did not care. With a full treasury and strong power, it just recruited ethnic minorities into the army in times of need. Eventually all the frontiers were guarded by ethnic soldiers. For example, An Lushan and Shi Siming were both from ethnic groups, even though their names were Han Chinese and they were high generals entrusted with the important duty of national defense. General Li Guangbi (AD 708–764), the equally prestigious contemporary of General Guo Ziyi (AD 697–781), who played the main role in putting down the rebel movements of An Lushan and Shi Siming, was also from an ethnic group rather than Han. This was a unique phenomenon of the Tang Dynasty.

Thanks to its unparalleled military power, the country’s neighbors were all reduced to subordinates. Emperor Taizong was reputed as the Heavenly Khan, or the Emperor of Emperors. The dynasty was too wealthy and too strong to remember national boundaries or to fear or be alert against outsiders. It recruited large numbers of ethnic soldiers and generals, resulting in total chaos. The military system deteriorated into separatist rule by warlords, with ethnic tribes infringing upon state power. The change was truly dramatic, not just a political change. When we study political systems, we should not limit our attention to the systems themselves. Rather, we should look far beyond.

³In early Tang, the government did not provide allowances to soldiers. The situation changed from mid-Tang downward.

2.5 Summary of the Tang System

Let me sum up the Tang system. In terms of the central government organization, the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry replaced the Three Lords and Nine High Officials system in the early part of Chinese history. Selection of officials through imperial examinations replaced recommendation by local officials. A unified tax system replaced the Tri-tax in the early history of the country. A voluntary military service system replaced the previous universal military system.

From these points we can say that the Tang system represented a fundamental transformation in political systems in Chinese history. As to whether post-Tang Chinese history changed for the better or the worse, that is another matter entirely. When the Roman Empire fell, there was no country of Rome later on or ever after. When the Tang Dynasty fell, China remained. The Tang Dynasty was followed by the Song, the Ming, and modern China. China remained China, as it was in the Tang Dynasty. This is the most valuable major subject in Chinese history. This is where the Tang Dynasty was so much more extraordinary than the Roman Empire, and indeed more extraordinary than any other great country in history. In Chinese history, while the Tang was the equal of the Han Dynasty, there was no subsequent dynasty able to match the vigor and vitality of either the Han or the Tang, none so deserving of our admiration and appreciation. We should be alert to and pay attention to this fact.

Glossary

Administration Hall	政事堂 Zhengshitang	
Administrative Consultant	参知机务 Canzhijiwu	
Central Commissioner	节度使 Jiedushi	
Central Supervisor	分察 Fenchā	
Central Supervisor	御史监察/分察	Yushijiancha
	/Yushifenchā	
Chief Secretary	中书令 Zhongshuling	
comment and return	涂归/封驳/封还/驳还	
	Tugui/Fengbo/Fenghuan/Bohuan	
county	县 Xian	
County Magistrate	县令/长 Xianling/Xianzhang	
Department of Rituals	礼部 Libu	
Deputy Chief Secretary	中书侍郎 Zhongshushilang	
Deputy Minister of Review	门下省侍郎 Menxiashengshilang	
Deputy Minister of Review	侍郎 Shilang	
Deputy Personnel Director	小中正 Xiaozhongzheng	

Deputy Prime Minister	御使大夫 (副宰相) yushidafu (fuzaxi- ang)
equal-land system	均田制度 Juntianzhidu
Executive Hall	都堂 Dutang
Executive Minister	尚书令 Shangshuling
Executive Ministry	尚书省 Shangshusheng
Executive Yuan (of Taiwan Province)	行政院 Xingzhengyuan
Ganlu Incident (in 835)	甘露事变 Ganlushibian
Garrison Commander	折冲都尉 Zhechongduwei
garrison	折冲府 Zhechongfu
garrison soldier	府兵 Fubing
General Governor	总督 Zongdu
grain tax	租 Zu
Grand General	大将军 Dajiangjun
Han Commander of Bodyguards	卫尉 Weiwei
Han official-selecting system	乡举里选 Xiangjulixuan
household and farmhand registration sys- tem	帐籍制度 Zhangjizhidu
Household Department	户部 Hubu
imperial edicts	敕 Chi
imperial envoys	钦差大臣 Qinchaidachen
imperial examination system	科举 Keju
imperial garrison	卫 Wei
Imperial Gateman	光禄勋 Guangluxun
Imperial Secretary	尚书 Shangshu
Judiciary Department	刑部 Xingbu
labor tax	庸 Yong
Left Deputy Executive Minister	尚书左仆射 Shangshuzuopuye
Left Minister of Supervision	左御史 Zuoyushi
Local Supervisor	察/巡察/观察使/监察使/巡察使 Ancha/Xuncha/Guanchashi/Jianchashi /Xunchashi
Master of Rituals	太常卿 Taichangqing
Mayor	府尹 Fuyin
Military Department	兵部 Bingbu
Military Zone	藩镇 Fanzhen
Minister of Review	门下省侍中 Menxiashengshizhong

Ministry of Review	门下省 Menxiasheng
Ministry of Supervision	御史台 Yushitai
Nine High Officials	九卿 Jiuqing
Nine-Rank System	九品中正制 Jiupinzhongzhengzhi
Nine-Square Land System	井田制 Jingtianzhi
officials-in-waiting	候补官 Houbuguan
Para-Secretary-Reviewer	同中书门下平章事 Tongzhongshu-menxiapingzhangshi
Personnel Department	吏部 Libu
Personnel Director (For Nine Ranks)	(九品)(大)中正 Zhongzheng
Personnel Director for Nine Ranks	九品中正 Jiupinzhongzheng
Personnel Director	大中正 Dazhongzheng
Personnel Division	吏部司 Libusi
Phoenix Pavilions	凤阁鸾台 Fenggeluantai
prefecture	州 Zhou
Prefecture Envoy	刺史 Cishi
Prefecture Governors	郡太守 Juntaishou
Qualified Candidate	进士及第 Jinshijidi
Region	道 Dao
Regional Administrative Commissioner	布政使 Buzhengshi
Regional Supervisor	巡抚 Xunfu
Rebellion of An Lushan(703-757) and Shi Siming (703-761) from 755 to 763	安史之乱 Anshizhiluan
Reviewer	给事中 Jishizhong
Right Deputy Executive Minister	尚书右仆射 Shangshuyoupuye
Right Minister of Supervision	右御史 Youyushi
<i>Rituals of Zhou</i>	《周礼》 Zhouli
Salt and Iron Policy	盐铁政策 Yantiezhengce
Secretariat	中书省 Zhongshusheng
Secretary	中书舍人 Zhongshusheren
<i>Six Departments of Tang</i>	《唐六典》 Tangliudian
slanted edicts in black ink	斜封墨敕 Xiefengmochi
subordinates	掾属 Yuanshu
supernumerary officials	员外官 Yuanwaiguan
textile tax	调 Diao
Tri-tax System	租庸调制 Zuyongdiaozi
Two-season Taxation System	两税制 Liangshuizhi

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Zuo's Commentary on The Spring and Autumn Annals

《左传》Zuozhuan

Chapter 3

The Song Dynasty



3.1 Government Organization of the Song Dynasty

3.1.1 *The Central Government*

Of the five dynasties discussed in these lectures Song (960–1279) was the poorest and weakest. It was also the least accomplished as regards political system. As before, when we discuss the Song central government, our starting point will be the power of the Prime Minister. In Chinese political systems, the Qin (221–206 BC) and Han (206 BC–AD 220) dynasties represented fundamental change; the Tang (AD 618–907) was very different from the Han. The Song Dynasty more or less followed the political system of the Tang. There was not much change, with the exception of superficial modifications to suit the times and under pressure from issues other than politics. Such modification cannot be counted as political accomplishment. The difference between the Song and the Tang was comparable to the difference between the Eastern Han (AD 25–220) and the Western Han (206 BC–AD 25). The government did its work, but there was no accomplishment as regards the political system.

3.1.2 *Division of the Power of the Prime Minister*

The Song Prime Minister's power was rather limited compared with his Tang counterpart.¹ Like Tang, the Song Dynasty also had three ministries, but only the Secretariat was based inside the imperial palace. The Executive Ministry and the Ministry of Review were both moved outside its walls. Under this arrangement, only the Cabi-

¹The heads of the Secretariat, the Executive Ministry and the Ministry of Review of Tang all performed the duties of a Prime Minister.

net could receive decrees from the Emperor. It was also called Administration Hall and its position was on a par with the Ministry of Military Affairs. The latter was a new organization in the late Tang Dynasty and the Five Dynasties (AD 907–960). Instead of reforming it, the Song government kept the Ministry of Military Affairs and attached much importance to it. The head of the Prime Secretariat acted as the Prime Minister, while the Executive Minister and the Minister of Review were not involved in the making of top-level orders of the government. On the other hand, since the Prime Minister had equal but not superior status to the Minister of Military Affairs, the former had no say in military affairs.

Financial affairs were divided among three divisions. The Song divisions were similar to the divisions below the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry. After the rebellion of An Lushan (AD 703–757) and Shi Siming (AD 703–761) from AD 755 to AD 763 in the Tang Dynasty, financial strain meant that the ministers sometimes concurrently headed a division. In the Song Dynasty, the government, unable to solve the problems in such an arrangement, allowed financial power of the state to fall into three divisions, namely, Household, Salt and Iron, and Accounting. In the Tang Dynasty, when the Prime Minister directly headed a division, such as Salt and Iron, or Accounting, he was in direct charge of financial affairs. While such an arrangement should not be taken as standard practice, at least the financial power was in the hands of the Prime Minister. It was most inappropriate of the Song government to upgrade the status of the three divisions so that they independently held the financial power of the state.

Therefore, when Wang Anshi (1021–1086) served as Prime Minister to Emperor Shenzong (r. 1067–1085), he initiated certain reform measures. The first one was to streamline the three divisions of Household, Salt and Iron, and Accounting into a single entity. The intent was to put financial power into the hands of the Prime Minister, as had been the case in the Tang Dynasty. The reform measure was strongly opposed by Sima Guang (1019–1086), who insisted that financial affairs should be kept by the three divisions. Sima's reasoning was that the directors of the divisions could be replaced if they failed to carry out their responsibilities properly. According to Sima, the Administration Hall and the Ministry of Military Affairs were not entitled to interfere with financial affairs. The differing views of Wang and Sima represented their different understandings of the political system of the time. Wang's idea was that financial power should be held by the Prime Minister. This was a matter of system, not personnel. It had nothing to do with the directors of the three divisions, be they competent or not. He wanted to redefine the power of the three divisions, and to unite the administrative power of the Secretariat, the military power, and the financial power in the hands of the Prime Minister. Sima, on the other hand, insisted on following the existing practice. He emphasized personnel matters, not the system itself. In political system terms, the separation of civil administrative, military and financial powers was actually unreasonable.

As regards the appointment of government officials, this had always been part of the powers and responsibilities of the Prime Minister. Who should be appointed and who should be promoted, such matters should be taken care of by the Personnel Department under the Executive Ministry led by the Prime Minister. The Song gov-

ernment, however, established an Assessment Department, later renamed Auditing Department. It was further divided into two parts. The East Part was responsible for selecting civil officials and the West Part military officers. In addition, the Song government set up a Military Assessment Department to monitor the performance of low-ranking military officials. Under this arrangement, the Prime Minister had no power whatsoever in personnel appointment. It was a manifestation of the lack of confidence and the self-serving intent of the imperial family in early Song. They established all these departments for the purpose of reducing the power of the Prime Minister. Not only was the Song Prime Minister different from his Tang counterpart, the function of the Executive Ministry as the central administrative organization was also damaged.

3.1.3 *Imperial Overreach*

The checking and fragmentation of military, financial and personnel power in the Song Dynasty showed the diminished power of the Prime Minister and the enhanced power of the Emperor on the other hand. According to court etiquette in the Tang Dynasty, the Prime Minister was entitled to be seated and be offered tea when the Emperor gave audience to court officials. This was called “the Three Lords discussing matters of importance, with the privilege of being seated” in ancient times. Such was the case with the Tang Prime Minister. In the Song Dynasty, however, the Prime Minister was obliged to stand along with the other court officials. The change was quite a pity. But we cannot simply place the blame on dark forces or the selfish motives of certain individuals.

Emperor Taizu (r. AD 960–976) had served as the Head of Court Guards in the Later Zhou Dynasty (AD 951–960), and it was by chance that he became Emperor overnight. His was not the first such case, either. In fact, he was the fourth Emperor by chance in his time. For several decades, it was the army who chose the Emperor. One day, Zhao Kuangyin (AD 927–976) was only the Head of the Court Guards; next day, he was the Emperor. Such was the reality of the chaotic Five Dynasties period. During that time, a Prime Minister could serve for 10 or 20 years, while the Emperor’s position was less stable. In terms of status and respect, no Emperor of the time could compare with Feng Dao (AD 882–954, who served as Prime Minister or high official in five dynasties). But then, an Emperor was an Emperor after all. If he, the head of state, could not command due respect, what could one expect of officials? To sort out the chaos, the first step should be to pay proper respect to the Emperor.

In addition, if the dignity of the Emperor fell below that of the Prime Minister, distrust was likely to rise between them. It is said that the Song Prime Minister insisted on standing in self-effacing manner at court, to demonstrate his loyalty to and support for the new Emperor. It was by such an approach that the dignity of the government and the Emperor was gradually restored. What happened was quite understandable, but the court officials were also to blame for their ignorance

of cardinal principles and lack of confidence. In the Tang Dynasty, officials, often from prominent family backgrounds, would never have behaved in such manner. Nor would Western Han officials, often from simple farming families, have done such a thing. Only the petty-minded scholar-turned-officials, who also had low social status, since the late Tang and the Five Dynasties could do such a thing. Still, their intention was understandable. Over the long passage of time, the truth behind the scene was lost to later generations, who saw only the dignity of the Emperor and humility of the Prime Minister.

Next, we'll talk about imperial decrees, which were the highest orders of the government. In the Tang Dynasty, they were drafted by the Secretariat. These were called Ready Drafts because they were complete and detailed. That meant that when the Secretariat submitted the drafts to the Emperor, he would just read through them and approve them by adding a few remarks and impressing the imperial seal at the end. The decrees would then be passed down to be carried out. It was a procedure where the Prime Minister drafted the decrees and the Emperor needed only to approve them. In present-day language, the Emperor had the power of approval over all the highest orders of the government.

In the early Song Dynasty, the Prime Minister would draft the outline of a decree, which was either a few suggestions or proposals, to avoid arousing the Emperor's suspicion, to show his respect for the throne, and to boost the dignity and status of the Emperor. Once the Emperor gave his decision, the Prime Minister would then draft the decree in full. This was a procedure where the Prime Minister "consulted the Emperor in person for approval or disapproval." The draft decree presented to the Emperor by the Song Prime Minister was very different from the Ready Draft of the Tang Dynasty. The final decision on the highest orders of the government rested with the Emperor, or at least the Emperor was involved in both the making and approving of such orders. The Prime Minister merely followed the Emperor's orders. That is why the Emperor's power was greater than the Prime Minister's.

Moreover, not all important orders of the government required imperial approval. In the Tang Dynasty, the Administration Hall could issue orders (called Hall Orders) across the country. The practice was followed in the early Song Dynasty, and Hall Orders were said to carry more weight than imperial decrees. Later on, the Emperor issued a decree stopping the Secretariat from issuing Hall Orders. So the Secretariat issued Draft Orders instead, which were actually similar to Hall Orders. Once, a local official, in disagreement with the Secretariat, returned a Draft Order to Emperor Taizong (r. AD 976–997). The enraged Taizong responded by prohibiting the Secretariat from issuing Draft Orders directly. Instead, he required the Prime Minister to submit all Draft Orders to him for approval and then issue them as imperial decrees. Even if some Draft Orders had to be issued, they must be approved by the Emperor. This is how all government orders came to be decided by the Emperor. Although a later Emperor, Shenzong, again allowed certain government orders to be issued by the Prime Minister, we can see that the Song Prime Minister was not able to carry out his duties to capacity.

Even so, we should not say, as we do in modern days, that Chinese traditional politics was all dictatorship and autocracy. I'll illustrate why with a story from the early

Song. Emperor Taizu asked Prime Minister Zhao Pu (AD 922–992) to recommend someone to fill a vacant official position. When the latter submitted a candidate, Taizu discovered it was the person he most disliked. “How could it be this man!” he said crossly, tearing up the paper and throwing it to the ground. Without a word, Zhao Pu picked up the pieces and put them away. When Taizu asked for a candidate again a few days later, Zhao Pu handed him the same torn-up recommendation paper, which he had glued together and carried with him. “Why is it still this man?” Taizu demanded in surprise. Zhao Pu replied that he thought no other person more suitable. Comprehending, Taizu nodded, “If this is so, do as you think fit!”

The story reminds us that Zhao Pu still had something of the traditional Prime Minister about him. The truth is, Zhao Pu was no typical scholar. He had become Prime Minister mainly because Emperor Taizu trusted him and because there were few qualified candidates. After Zhao Pu was appointed, Taizu reminded him from time to time that he should study the *Analects* of Confucius. Later generations described Zhao Pu as ruling the country with half of the *Analects*, probably because he did not study the book thoroughly. Despite his lack of scholarship, Zhao Pu was a good Prime Minister after all, the first of the Song Dynasty. We can tell this from the previous story. Still, he could not be regarded as an outstanding exception, as he did no more than what was required of a Prime Minister by historical tradition.

The fact that the Prime Minister had less power than the norm does not fit some people’s imagination that Chinese traditional politics was all imperial dictatorship and autocracy. Besides, the Song imperial family instructions to their younger members were to treat scholars with respect and it was an imperial taboo to kill court officials. None of the Emperors of the Northern Song (960–1127) were known as cruel or autocratic. The overriding problem of the Song Dynasty was lack of central power and weak rule, rather than autocracy and cruelty. Even when the Southern Song (1127–1279) was on the brink of collapse, the court officials still criticized Emperor Ningzong (r. 1194–1224) for issuing imperial decrees without going through the Secretariat. They called his act disruption of administration. We can see that the Song Prime Minister still enjoyed the traditional objective status. Historically speaking, we can say that Song was inferior to Tang. The Song Prime Minister failing to carry out his duties to capacity was a problem with the system. It was not a matter of autocratic Emperors doing away with the system.

3.1.4 *Supervision and the Dilemma of the Government*

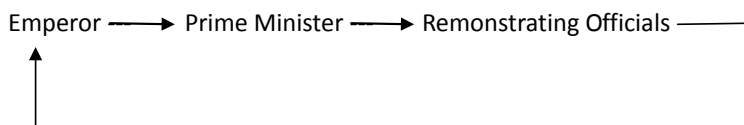
I will now talk about the supervision officials of the Song Dynasty. In the Han Dynasty, the Deputy Prime Minister was in charge of supervision over both central and local officials, and over both the imperial family and the imperial court. The Secondary Deputy Prime Minister was charged with supervision over the imperial family and the imperial court, or the Emperor himself. The Deputy Prime Minister had another deputy, the Central Supervisor, to help him supervise the government, that is, the central and local officials. In terms of power division, the Deputy Prime

Minister acted as the ears and eyes of the Prime Minister. While the Prime Minister issued orders, the Deputy Prime Minister supervised their implementation. Back then, both the imperial court and the government were under the supervision of the Prime Minister. In other words, the imperial court was not above supervision. In later dynasties, the function of supervision was moved outside the imperial palace to become the Ministry of Supervision, which could supervise the government but not the Emperor and the imperial family.

However, there were still government officials to supervise the Emperor. They were called Remonstrating Officials. Back in the Han Dynasty, there was the Imperial Supervisor under the Imperial Gateman. His job was to follow the Emperor, supervising the Emperor's words and acts through direct or indirect criticism. The Imperial Gateman was one of the Nine High Officials under the Prime Minister. Thus the Imperial Supervisor was also under the Prime Minister.

Up to the Tang Dynasty, this kind of officials all belonged to the Ministry of Review, such as Reviewers, Imperial Supervisors, Reminders, and Rectifiers. The renowned Tang poet Du Fu (AD 712–770) served as a Reminder for some time. These officials were not high in position, nor did they hold great power, but they enjoyed great respect from the government. Most of them were young, learned, with high moral integrity but without much official or political background. Although their positions were low, they were entitled to speak to the Emperor. “Reminder” literally means “to remind the Emperor when he forgets something” and “Rectifier” literally means “to correct the Emperor when he makes a mistake.” Remonstrators and Exhorters had the similar responsibility to remind the Emperor of his errors.

In the Tang Dynasty, the Emperor would not have long group meetings with court officials if there was no special issue. He would dismiss them and then discuss particular matters with the Prime Minister. On such occasions, only the remonstrating officials in the Ministry of Review were allowed to be present, to the exclusion of other officials. The arrangement allowed them to speak out on things that were difficult for the Prime Minister to broach directly with the Emperor. In this way, if the Emperor was displeased, he could not direct his anger at the Prime Minister. If the Remonstrating Officials spoke correctly, that was perfect; if they said anything wrong, it did not matter very much, because their position obliged them to speak out. As petty officials in low positions, it was excusable if they spoke anything wrong. As the saying goes, “Those who speak out should not be blamed but be heeded by those who hear.” With these Remonstrating Officials present, the Prime Minister was able to avoid direct conflict with the Emperor. At the same time, they could give voice to what the Prime Minister wanted to say. This was a political sleight of hand, born out of the need for an ideal. The ideal was a balanced power relationship between the Emperor and the Prime Minister. It can be illustrated by a simple diagram:



The Prime Minister worked for the Emperor, the Remonstrating Officials worked for the Prime Minister by pointing out the Emperor's errors. Their job was different from the Deputy Prime Minister, who supervised government officials. The Remonstrating Officials did not bother the government; they only bothered the Emperor. If the Remonstrating Officials can be regarded as supervisors, there were two types of them in Chinese history, namely those in the Ministry of Supervision and the Remonstrating Officials. In the Tang Dynasty, the Supervising Officials functioned as informants for the Emperor and the Remonstrating Officials as the mouthpiece of the Prime Minister. Although the supervising power was independent of the Prime Minister, the power to remonstrate with the Emperor remained under the Prime Minister.

This system changed in the Song Dynasty. While the Remonstrating Officials belonged to the Ministry of Review (in the Tang Dynasty), they were independent of any Department of Supervision in the Song. In other words, they were not under the direction of the Prime Minister. Under the Song system, the Prime Minister was not eligible to appoint Remonstrating Officials. Both Supervising and Remonstrating Officials were appointed by the Emperor himself. By nature of their title, the Remonstrating Officials were appointed to correct the Emperor, not the Prime Minister. They should also be under the leadership of the Prime Minister. Now that the Remonstrating Officials did not belong to the Ministry of Review, they had no superior above them and were independent of the Prime Minister. As they were appointed by the Emperor, not the Prime Minister, they turned from correcting the Emperor to correcting the Prime Minister. Gradually, these officials grew into an oppositional force to the government.

Since their job was to speak on any matter at any place, to do otherwise would be dereliction of duty. Moreover, it did not matter if they said anything wrong. They were low in position, had little power, but high reputation. They were selected from among learned young scholars with insight and a respectable reputation, bold and eloquent. If they were really wrong, they would be removed from office, of course. But then, those who were removed would gain greater fame and were more likely to be promoted instead. Therefore, they made a point of contradicting whatever the Prime Minister had to say. They never agreed with the government; they always disagreed. Otherwise, why were they called Remonstrating Officials? How were they to fulfill their duty? This was how they became an oppositional force against the government, giving empty comments without any responsibility. They always tended to express opinions contrary to those of the government. They followed no principle: every one of the contingent of Remonstrating Officials could express an individual opinion, and the government could not always ignore them.

Such a social fashion of making comments without taking responsibility began with the Song Dynasty. It was always anti-government. Making comments without taking responsibility was not all bad, but it came to handicap the government. Gradually, the distinction between Supervising Officials and Remonstrating Officials became blurred. Both targeted the government as the object of supervision and remonstrance, while neither supervised or criticized the Emperor. The Prime

Minister had to be responsible for the Emperor and deal with the supervisors and remonstrators as well. How was he able to do his job?

What we have discussed above mostly concerned personnel arrangement, not the political system, which more or less followed that of the Tang Dynasty. The problem had to do with the early emperors, Taizu and Taizong, who, ignorant of the cardinal principles, took over the powers of the Prime Minister. In other words, it was because they did not trust their ministers, due to Taizu's rise from the ranks of junior soldiers. There were those who opposed their practices from the outset. However, due to lack of learning, a problem inherited from the Five Dynasties period, the Song Dynasty had few scholars and learning was on the wane. Such opponents only knew the Song system to be inferior to that of Tang, but were unable to establish a new system to suit the overall situation.

Later, Song Emperors gained a better understanding of history and politics through reading, the number of scholars also increased and there was a general revival in learning. Emperors Renzong (r. 1022–1063), Yingzong (r. 1063–1067) and Shenzong realized the malpractices of their predecessors, but it was by then too late for them to reform. The reforms respectively led by Fan Zhongyan (989–1052) and Wang Anshi both failed. Even though Emperor Shenzong fully trusted Wang Anshi, the latter was not able to carry through reform, thanks to the opposition of the Remonstrating Officials. Unlike present-day opposition parties in the West, these officials acted as unorganized individuals. Their intention seemed to be upholding justice, not opposing the government. In this way, they were even more powerful than present-day opposition parties in the West. Should the Prime Minister not listen to their opinion, they would resign and become even more famous. When a Remonstrating Official was appointed, he would follow his predecessor's views and continue to oppose the government, which could not dismiss them. Such a system and such a practice were truly hard to handle. Ultimately, it was the Prime Minister who had to resign. Opposition from the Remonstrating Officials was one of the reasons for the failure of the Wang Anshi reforms. Even the Emperor, who trusted the Prime Minister, could not reverse the tide. Even when the Emperor and the Prime Minister worked together, they could not deal with the Remonstrating Officials, a weakness unique to the Song system.

In the end, these officials went so far, became so willful and nonsensical that the whole society and entire government grew tired of them and ignored them all together. As the influence of Remonstrating Officials waned, power-grabbing Prime Ministers and treacherous officials came to the fore. How could a government do a good job without a good system? No good outcome could be expected of such a government.

3.1.5 Local Governments of the Song Dynasty

The Song system was marked by diminished Prime Ministerial power and concentration of power in the central government. In terms of local government, the Han

Dynasty was good, the Tang Dynasty was passable, but the Song Dynasty was very bad.

There were three levels of local government in the Song Dynasty. The top level was region, similar to that of the Tang Dynasty. The medium level (similar to that in the Tang) included prefecture, special prefecture (either in politics, economy, or military affairs), military prefecture (in military affairs or transportation), and economic prefecture. The bottom level was county, as in the Tang. There were 15 Regions in early Song, which were further divided later into more than 20.

Since the Five Dynasties, all the local officials came from the army. At banquets in 961 and 969, Emperor Taizu changed the situation by persuading the generals to give up their military power, after which military officials had no troops to command, nor were they allowed to meddle with local civil administration. The military officials had grown tired of long years of war. They had seen the light and no longer clung to power. In return, they still enjoyed their official titles, plus a mansion in the capital and a fat salary, both provided by the central government. For example, the Army Commander of Jiangsu would retain his title but had to live in the capital. The government would send a civil official to Jiangsu to govern, with the title of Managing Prefect. These officials had proper positions in the central government and their local position was actually temporary. In a strict sense, that was only a personnel arrangement, not a system. It was not until the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911) that the Managing Prefect and the Managing County Magistrate became real local officials. That was most unreasonable. Basically the Song Dynasty had no local officials at all. The central government only dispatched officials to serve as local officials on a temporary basis. Was that not an absurdity of the system?

In the Tang Dynasty, the regional governor was the Local Supervisor sent by the Ministry of Supervision to supervise local administration, not to act as a local official. They eventually became local officials, as was discussed in the lecture on the Tang. In the Song Dynasty, there were four types of regional posts held by central-government officials. They were generally called Supervisors. The Military Supervisor was responsible for managing military and civil affairs in a Region, such as maintaining discipline and rewarding based on merits. The Financial Supervisor took care of finance, taxation, tributes to the central government, management of revenues and savings. The Judicial Supervisor was responsible for legal cases and verification of prison sentences, and the Relief Supervisor mainly responsible for irrigation and relief work. None of them were true local officials; they were all sent by the central government to supervise local work. In the Tang Dynasty, the prefectures and counties had only one superior from the central government to answer to; namely, the Local Supervisor. In the Song, they had four such officials; namely, the Military, Financial, Judicial, and Relief Supervisors. We can imagine how difficult it was to be a real local official.

Of the four, the Financial Supervisor was the most important. He controlled the local finance and transferred all local revenues to the central government. In the Tang Dynasty, local governments handed in part of their revenues to the central government and kept part for their own disposal. The Song central government took away all local revenues, leaving the localities with nothing in reserve. Finance was

scarce as a rule and unimaginable when events occurred. Concentration of power in the Song Dynasty meant concentration of both military and financial power with the central government, leaving the local governments poor and weak. Concentration of talent was the same as in the Tang Dynasty.

It was precisely because of poor and weak local governments in the Song that the entire country collapsed soon after the central capital Bianjing (in present-day Henan Province) was captured by the troops of the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234). There simply was no strength for resistance. The Rebellion of An Lushan and Shi Siming in the Tang Dynasty was no less strong than the Jin troops in military terms and the rebels captured both capitals of Chang'an (present-day Xi'an and its precincts in Shaanxi Province) and Luoyang (in present-day Henan Province). However, since all the prefectures were rich and every city had savings of grain to last several years and weapons and military equipment, resistance to the rebels rose everywhere. Now that the Song Dynasty concentrated all wealth and military strength at central government level, leaving nothing to the localities, the entire country collapsed once the central government fell. There was no way out.

3.2 Imperial Examination for Selecting Officials in the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty system for selecting officials more or less followed the Tang way, apart from minor changes that we shall pass over here. The effect, however, was quite different. In the Tang Dynasty, families with high social status and good learning had a strong influence. Many of those taking part in the imperial examination came from such families. They had enjoyed a good education at home and understood many political practices early in life. Once they entered politics, they were quite resourceful.

However, not many such families remained in the later years of Tang. By that time most examination candidates came from poor families. Apart from their study of the required subjects, such as prose and poetry, and memorization of classics, the state did not provide them any education (in governance). They didn't have a good family education either in learning or fine traditions as those from families of prestigious status, not to mention any knowledge about political traditions. Thus "qualified candidates with low social status" became a popular saying in late Tang. By the time of the Song Dynasty, there were no families with high social status and good learning, apart from the Lü and Han families. Candidates from the countryside, from poor families and remote areas, once they passed the examination they entered politics with little idea about real politics. They had no family learning to fall back on at all.

Secondly, the Tang selection system had two features, pre-reading and public evaluation. Pre-reading refers to the reading of a candidate's prose essay and poetry composed any time before the formal examination. Candidates would submit them to

government officials known for their scholarship and credentials. In this way, these officials had a chance to evaluate the candidates even before the examination. Those who had already distinguished themselves would have their reputation reconfirmed through such evaluations. Announcement of successful candidates was based on the opinions of the recommending officials and the public, not solely on examination performance. Sometimes the chief examiner would refuse, on grounds of modesty, to decide the rankings, citing the excuse that he didn't have thorough knowledge about the candidates. He would ask another person to decide the rankings. Sometimes a candidate might be invited to decide the rankings, and he might well decide that he himself should be the top-ranking scholar. Such incidents were seen as laudable at the time, not regarded as fraud.

The purpose of the examination was to select true talent for the state. Details were less important than respect for the essence and original intention of the system. Of course, there were those who took advantage of the openness of the system to engage in fraud, so the government had to tighten up control to prevent cheating. This was an issue faced by all systems. Being circumspect in designing a system, such as putting too much emphasis on preventing fraud, may sometimes lead to diversion from the main purpose. The Song selection system was much stricter than the Tang's. The candidates' names would be covered up so that evaluation was solely based on their writings on the examination day. Therefore, even if the chief examiner wanted to recruit his favorite student, he had no way of doing so and this person might fail the exam. The stricter system thus might result in missing out on truly talented candidates.

In the Tang Dynasty, the Department of Rituals administered the selection exam, while the Department of Personnel appointed the qualified candidates. They were not officially appointed immediately. Instead, the examination-qualified candidates should work on probation in different government departments and serve as officials-in-waiting, so as to gain hands-on experience in political affairs. As the Song Dynasty was founded after the long dark rule of the Five Dynasties, people were not interested in learning. So the government painstakingly encouraged Confucian learning and put great stress on the selection examination. Scholars who were qualified in the examinations would get good positions. The fine tradition of practical training established in the Han Dynasty and retained in the Tang was lost in the Song. Those were the shortcomings of the Song selection system. In general, the Song selection system carried more weight and was stricter than before, but it was not necessarily more effective.

Nevertheless, thanks to the government's emphasis over the years, a climate of scholarship was revived. As a result, many people proposed reforms to the system. Firstly, they proposed establishing school education to replace selection of officials by examination. This was the key point. Examination was a way to select, not to train, talent. The Han Dynasty had the Imperial Academy and the Tang Dynasty had families of prestigious social status and learning. Both served the purpose of training talent. Only when the society trained talent could the government select them through examination. For the Song people to advocate education was correct, but this could not be realized overnight.

Secondly, they proposed to reform the content of the examination, replacing literary knowledge and skills with Confucian classics. This was also a good proposal. The ability to master literary knowledge and skills was indeed not a proper standard for selecting talent for the government. But the reform was ultimately unsuccessful: Testing on Confucian classics was even worse than testing on literary knowledge and skills. Wang Anshi lamented that the reform turned scholars into bookworms, not the other way round, contrary to its intent. I won't go into further detail about the gains and losses of the reform. We can see from the above discussion that a system must suit the circumstances. Its function and effect will change as conditions change.

Whatever its flaws, the selection system remained an important part of the political system in China. The fact that it lasted for more than 1000 years from the Tang down to the Qing Dynasty, and the reforms and evolution it went through all indicate the intelligence and wisdom of many people. Its historic development was by no accident. In the late Qing Dynasty, the West still borrowed the system to make up for the defects in their system of political party election, but we jettisoned it without a second thought. We paid no more attention to this thousand-year-old system. What a strange thing to do! Fortunately, Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) retrieved the system and made it one of the Five Constitutional Rights. He actually picked up a treasure that had been cast into the dirt. Today, we still pay insufficient attention to studying how selection evolved over its history of more than 1000 years. It is as if the selection system in Chinese history were a policy to deceive the people hatched by our unique dark autocratic politics. We talk about today's selection system in total isolation from its origins in history and tradition. This is indeed our prejudice, a far cry from the truth. Sadly, aside from this lecture, we shall have no further detailed discussion on the selection system.

3.3 Taxation System of the Song Dynasty

The Song followed the Tang Two-season Taxation System. We shall not explore all the details, but will focus on a few key points. Under the Two-season System, all the taxes were levied under one category. The Tri-tax System (in early Tang) distinguished taxes on land, labor and local products (mainly textiles). Let me explain it with a simplified example. The farmers in Taiwan hand in grain to the government. This is land tax. The people are required to render labor such as building airports, roads and irrigation works. This is the labor tax. Sugar is a local product of Taiwan, so it must hand in a certain quantity to the government, and this is contributed by individual farming households. This is the local products tax. The Two-season Taxation System includes all these under the category of land tax so that it has become higher. Now that the government is collecting (higher) land tax, it should hire laborers to build airports and roads, and pay out for sugar or other products. This was how all the taxes came under one category (since Emperor Dezong's reign, AD 779–805). The practice went wrong many years later. The late Tang Dynasty was plagued by frequent wars. When the army arrived in a place, it required the people to build roads and supply

local products. When troops from other localities arrived in Taiwan, for example, they would require the local people to give them sugar, instead of buying it from them. The armies regarded their demand as a traditional practice, forgetting that such things had already been included in and inflated the Two-season Taxation. Now that the troops required locals to supply labor and local products, weren't they just adding to the burden on the people? The problem had been foreseen when the Tang implemented the Two-season Taxation System. The proponents, however, were focused on the convenience of collecting a single tax and refused to take the warning seriously. The problem gradually became prominent later on.

There was another serious problem. Back in the Han Dynasty, there were local organizations headed by the Three Elders, who were responsible for education. Under the Three Elders, there was a Landlord responsible for collecting land tax and a Police Head responsible for local order. They represented the local people and assisted the government. The local organizations existed only in name in the Sui (AD 581–618) and Tang dynasties. During the Five Dynasties, armies would require the local people to supply labor and local products wherever they appeared. Since labor and local products were already included but not specified in the national taxation system, the armies would ask local leaders for housing, hay (for horse fodder), tools, young men (to join the army), and other supplies. It was a difficult job, but the local leaders had to oblige. Troops came and went, and the local leaders had to meet their demands all the time. The local government officials, at the same time, found the local leaders both useful and convenient. Therefore, if no local leader existed already, they would find someone to do the job. As the troops moved around like flowing water and as they required a local leader wherever they went, the local leaders would be financially ruined in just a few years. Then the local government officials would find another family to do the job. Later on, even when there was no army requirement, local government officials would still demand local leaders to do one thing after another. That became an extra burden on the local people. Even worse, it led to there being no prosperous families remaining: one after another, they were weighed down by the extra burden. That was what the labor tax was like in the Song Dynasty.

The Song labor tax, like the Qin military system, was a legacy of history. They became serious social problems because the government did not consider carefully at the beginning. To deal with the problem, Wang Anshi reformed the labor tax system by requiring local governments to collect an averaged amount of money from each and every family. In this way, (prosperous) families would not be brought down by performing duties for the government. The reform caused a huge controversy, as it required the people to pay money in lieu of labor, an extra burden on the people. Wang Anshi insisted that since the government had to require the localities to perform duties for the government, it was less harmful to average out the cost between all the families than to place the entire burden on the rich ones and eventually force them into ruin one by one.

When Sima Guang became Prime Minister, he went against all the reforms by Wang Anshi, including the labor tax reform. Wang, then retired and living in Nanjing, reacted, "How can you oppose this practice?" Obviously, he was confident of his reform. Su Dongpo (1037–1101) was originally against Wang's reform of the labor

tax system, but later he opposed Sima's repealing of the reform. When Sima insisted, Su criticized him, "We opposed Wang Anshi for not listening to different opinions. Now that you are Prime Minister, why are you doing the same?" Sima did not listen to Su's protest. Then Cai Jing (1047–1126) came along and promised that he would be able to restore the old labor tax system within three months, which he actually did. Later on, however, it was the very same Cai who toppled Sima and reinstated Wang's reform. These days, we know Cai Jing was a bad man, but back then even Sima Guang regarded him as a good man.

From the change of the labor tax system and the controversies over it, we can see that it was not easy for people living at the time to evaluate the merits and demerits of a system. It was even more difficult to tell the virtuous or treacherous people. Cai Jing did even more harm to Wang than to Sima. That was because he later espoused reform and destroyed the Song Dynasty, which led to later generations accusing Wang as a small-minded man. Was it not Cai who caused Wang to be wrongly accused? The practice of collecting a labor tax, initiated by Wang, was continued through to the Qing Dynasty and to the present; actual *corvée* labor to perform government duties was stopped and has never been restored.

Because actual physical labor was replaced by tax, no exact counting of population size was needed. The government had household registration books in the Song and Ming dynasties. The Qing government kept such books at the beginning but gradually gave up the records. Even those of the Song and Ming (1368–1644) were not quite reliable, because the government did not regard them as important. However, Wang Anshi's labor tax was averaged across households, and had to be based on good records of household numbers. Under the One-Whip Taxation system in the Ming Dynasty, poll tax was included in the land tax. That resulted in even less attention to population figures. In the mid-Qing Dynasty, the government issued a decree (in 1712) to the effect that poll tax should be fixed (based on the population in 1711) and included as part of land tax. The decree also promised never to increase the total amount of poll tax from then on. That decree rendered household registration books otiose. Only the land had a direct relationship with the government; population size did not. A person with no land, who did not take part in the imperial examination for officials, and who broke no law, could live all his life without having anything to do with the government. How could such a situation be foreseen and heartily approved by the idealists in Chinese political history who advocated light taxation?

3.4 Military System and Weak National Defense of the Song Dynasty

The Song Dynasty had two types of troops, the imperial army and local troops. The Song military system was the worst in the entire history of China. There were historical causes, so we should not blame the Song government for everything. The late Tang and the Five Dynasties suffered from frequent wars between overbearing

commanders of the Military Zones. Almost everybody was drafted into the army and few were left for learning. Initially, the troops were quite decent, but as the soldiers grew old and weak the troops lost their combat capacity. The soldiers were then forced to do hard labor like convicts. At that time, recruits had to have their face tattooed, as a measure to prevent them deserting. In *Outlaws of the Marshes*, Song Jiang and Wu Song, and other rebels, were all such recruits sent to a local camp to do hard labor. Such men were contemptuously called “wicked soldiers.” Such was the situation during the Five Dynasties period and it did not completely change in the Song Dynasty. Such troops were of no military use, of course. What they did was actually corvée labor, as in the Han and Tang dynasties, rather than military service. Back in the Han Dynasty, local leaders helped arrange corvée labor that the Song government directly required of the people. The changes were extremely unreasonable. As it was difficult to solve the accumulated problems of previous dynasties, Emperor Taizu had no better choice than selecting a number of young and strong soldiers from among the existing troops to form the imperial army. There were standards for height and weight for selecting imperial soldiers. At first, a real soldier served as the model. Later on, a wooden model was sent to local troops and those who reached the standards were chosen to serve in the imperial army. The imperial army built up in this way was quite up to the mark. Those who fell short of the standards would have to remain in the local troops. The local troops were usually stationed in the areas immediately outside the city gates. They were not supposed to fight battles but to do casual work for the local governments.

The first sensible thing for the newly established Song Dynasty to do would have been to demobilize the troops, but rather than demobilization, it chose to reduce most of the soldiers to the status of laborers. The main reason for this was that when the Song Dynasty was established, it had not really united the whole of China. Song’s arch enemy, the Liao Dynasty (907–1125), had established its government more than 50 years previously. The 16 prefectures of the Yan and Yun regions² had long been ceded by Shi Jingtang (AD 892–942) to the Liao. Chahar (present-day eastern Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and northern Hebei Province), Rehe (an area bordering present-day Hebei, Liaoning and Inner Mongolia), Liaoning and parts of Shanxi and Hebei provinces were all in the hands of the Liao. The Song capital was seated in Kaifeng (in present-day Henan province), without any defense line to its north. It was situated on a plain, open to the Yellow River (to the north). To the east of the Taihang Mountains is also a huge plain. Cavalry troops (of the nomadic tribes) in the north could reach the Yellow River in about three days. Once across the Yellow River they would be as good as at Kaifeng’s city gates. Therefore, the Song Dynasty had no national defense.

Had the Song established its capital in Luoyang (to the west of Kaifeng, also in present-day Henan Province), there would have been some kind of defense. This is

²The Yan and Yun regions refer to the areas that had present-day Beijing and Datong of Shanxi Province as the centers, reaching Shenchu County of Shanxi in the west, Zunhua City of Hebei Province in the east, and the Great Wall in the North. The southern line of the Regions runs from Tianjin City, through Hejian and Baoding cities of Hebei Province, to Fanshi and Ningwu counties of Shanxi Province.

because when the Liao troops came down from Beiping (present-day Beijing) and crossed the Yellow River, they had to move west through a range of mountains, the so-called Jingsuo Mountains, which formed a natural defense barrier. The present-day rail line connecting Jiangsu Province (in the east) and Lanzhou of Gansu Province (in the west) runs through that area. If the Liao cavalry came down from the frontier province of Shanxi, the Yanmen Pass and the Wutai Mountains could function as a secondary defense line, which would hinder their advance towards the Yellow River. It would have been even better had the Song Dynasty been able to establish its capital in Xi'an (even further to the west of Kaifeng), as the Han and Tang dynasties did in the past.

So why didn't Emperor Taizu set the capital in Luoyang or even better Xi'an, instead of Kaifeng? Because he really had no alternative. At the time, there was only a dilapidated national defense line, with the Yan and Yun regions in the hands of the Liao. He had to maintain a large number of troops and they had to be fed, but the grain supply for the army all came from the areas along the Yangtze River in the south. The Central Plain area along the Yellow River in the north had already declined at the end of the Tang Dynasty and in the Five Dynasties, and the economy in the north depended on the south. There was a canal starting from Yangzhou (covering parts of present-day Jiangsu and Anhui provinces) and running to the north and then west to reach Kaifeng. This was not the same canal as was built under the Yuan Dynasty; it was the Tongji Canal, built during Emperor Yang's reign (AD 604–618) of the Sui Dynasty and running along the route of present-day Lanzhou-Lianyungang rail line. When grain was shipped to Kaifeng along the Tongji Canal, there was no waterway to ship it further to Luoyang, since the Bian Canal was already in disrepair by this time. Overland transportation was even more difficult, thanks to the higher cost of labor and materials. Born out of the chaotic and dark rule of the Five Dynasties period, the infant Song Dynasty was incapable of shipping military grain from Kaifeng to Luoyang. Added to which, Chang'an was by that time in a broken state. The Song Dynasty was obliged to make do with Kaifeng as the capital. Emperor Taizu said he would move the capital westward later, once peace prevailed.

The Song Dynasty had two possible national military strategies. One was to attack the Northern Han (AD 951–979) and the Liao dynasties to the north of the Yellow River. Once they were defeated, the Yangtze River basin would be pacified without a war. It was an aggressive and highly risky policy. Should it fail, the Song Dynasty would have no place of retreat. The other strategy was to bring the Yangtze River basin to peace and unite the south before taking on the north. This more prudent policy was the one chosen by Emperor Taizu. He united the south and left the more difficult job of uniting the north to his successor. On his deathbed and keeping in mind the advice of his mother, Emperor Taizu passed the throne to his younger brother Zhao Kuangyi (AD 939–997), who became Emperor Taizong. Taizong personally led two campaigns against the Liao Dynasty, both of them failures. In the second campaign, Taizong sustained an arrow injury in the battle that took place on the bank of the Gaoliang River between Xizhimenwai and the Summer Palace in Beiping (Beijing). He later died of the wound. This story fails to get a mention in the official history.

Because of such a situation in the early years of its founding, the Song Dynasty could not disarm nor stand down its troops; nor did it ever dare to take on the Liao Dynasty again. The Song could not afford to fail. If it failed in any further war against the Liao, it would have to retreat to the bank of the Yellow River and the basis of the state would be shaken. Under such circumstances, the Song Dynasty had to keep many troops but could not fight wars. Even though the government was aware of the situation, it still had to keep the troops. More strangely, the government did not value the troops. Instead, it strongly emphasized civil administration. We should not blame the Song government for this, actually. It was precisely because of their attention to civil administration that the Song Dynasty succeeded in reversing the historical tide of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties periods. The Song government only wanted to maintain the troops to defend against external invasion. Meanwhile, it advocated civil administration at the cost of the military. The purpose was to discourage the army from growing arrogant so as to avoid repeating the chaos of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. As a result, the Song government maintained military troops without making use of them, and their number kept growing.

In *Outlaws of the Marshes*, Lin Chong was one of the trainers for 830,000 soldiers of the Imperial Army. Actually, there were only 200,000 troops when Emperor Taizu founded Song. His successors Emperor Taizong and Emperor Renzong had respectively 660,000 troops and 1.25 million. This is why reduction of troop numbers was one of Prime Minister Wang Anshi's reform measures. His intention was to restore the national military service system of the past dynasties to replace the existing mercenary system. Since it was difficult to restore the old system nationwide within a short period of time, Wang Anshi tried out a local farmer-soldier system in the Yellow River basin. Farmers received training in their home areas and it was hoped they could be organized into troops in times of war. In this way the government could save expenses on troop maintenance.

The mercenary system was not bad per se. Mercenary troops could be very useful in certain places and under certain circumstances. They should be maintained to target an enemy that had to be fought and defeated within a few years. Under such a condition, mercenary troops could be intensively trained to fight the enemy when they were ready. It was perhaps a better practice than the national military service system. The Beifu troops of the Eastern Jin Dynasty (AD 317–420), for example, were mercenary soldiers and they achieved outstanding feats.

In the Song Dynasty, however, the national defense was defensive in nature. The government dared not to take offensive moves and focused on defense instead. The mercenary system and such a long-term defensive policy were a bad match. When a soldier was recruited at a young age, he could not leave the army until 60, whereas he could render effective service only in his 20s. In the remaining 30 years following a decade of active service, he had grown tired in spirit, besides being old in age. Troops of such soldiers were of little use, so the government had to recruit new ones. Thus, troop numbers kept on growing.

Lax in discipline, the numerous troops were no good for defending against external invasions but were liable to cause internal disorder. Although the Song government was wary of a repeat of the problems caused by arrogant soldiers during the late Tang

and the Five Dynasties periods, the soldiers in the Song Dynasty did act in the same way. The government had to provide for them and keep improving the provision, otherwise they would mutiny. As the government had no effective way of dealing with the troops, it placed special emphasis on scholars, with civil administrators enjoying higher status than military officials. Military officials were kept in the capital with nothing to do. They lived at government expense, including hundreds of kilos of firewood in winter. In addition, the number of civil administrators increased, as did their benefits. With bloated troop numbers on the one hand and overstaffed bureaucracy on the other, the state struggled on, becoming poorer and weaker with every year. The Song government could find no way to reverse the situation.

To prevent soldiers growing arrogant or becoming lax, Emperor Taizu set the rule of rotating the Imperial Troops between different frontier areas. As local troops were of little competence, all the frontiers had to be guarded by Imperial Troops. Furthermore, the Imperial Troops were not allowed to station in one area for long. For instance, after a batch of troops had garrisoned in Hebei Province for a year, they would be moved to station in the capital. After a while, they would be moved to Shanxi Province. Unlike the Han and Tang dynasties practice that allowed eventual demobilization, the Song soldiers could not expect to retire. They were either guarding the frontier or based in the capital. The troops got tired of such frequent moves and consequently required higher pay. This is why, despite the absence of war for years on end, the troops were still mobilized annually as if in wartime and military expenses kept on climbing.

Not only were the troops always on the move, but they were separated from the commanders, who remained in the same place. Thus the soldiers were not familiar with their commanders and vice versa. This arrangement stemmed from concern about commanders having too much power. In times of emergency, however, the lack of connection between commanders and soldiers made it difficult for them to fight. Therefore, throughout its history, the Song Dynasty had to maintain troops but did not pay them due respect. How could this encourage the army to fight for honor? Di Qing (1008–1057), the most outstanding of Song generals, had risen from the ranks and was highly respected by ordinary soldiers. But then, the government never gave him the honor merited by his military feats, simply for fear he would follow the example of Emperor Taizu, who put on an imperial robe and claimed the throne. The Song Dynasty thus fell as a result of maintaining troops.

When the Song Dynasty was founded, the country had suffered badly from military chaos during the Tang and the Five Dynasties periods. Therefore, the Song set great store by civil administration and restrained the power of the military. Emperor Taizu's deathbed word to his offspring was that they must never ever kill a single scholar. They indeed followed Taizu's instructions and held respect for civil administrators and scholars. The imperial family abided by the rule down to the Southern Song Dynasty. And not only that: actually the Song imperial family greatly respected and rewarded scholars, which is why the dynasty was able to gradually revive culture out of the chaotic, dark conditions of the late Tang and the Five Dynasties. The foundation of Song Confucian Studies was laid during a hundred or so years of the Song Dynasty. Scholars in the Song Dynasty all advocated respect for the Emperor

and resistance against ethnic tribes. They upheld historical traditions, which allowed China to continue. That's why the Song Dynasty represents the halfway mark of Chinese history up to the present day. The saying "a decent man is loath to join the army, just as a good piece of iron is loath to be hammered into a nail" originated in the Song people's favor of scholars over soldiers.

As we look back on history, it is only fair to say that the Song government tried its best to redress the problems left by the Tang government. We should not blame it for not being able to solve all the residual problems, and should be aware that many of them were created by the Tang, which tended to flex its military muscles. Up to Xuanzong's reign (AD 712–756), for example, the Tang government was a militaristic power much like a modern-day imperialist state. That was not good. The Roman Empire fell because of its push for imperialism, and it ceased to exist thereafter. Chinese history and culture continued after the imperialist Tang Dynasty because it was followed by the Song Dynasty. We should not be blind to its hard effort (in reviving the culture) just because the Song Dynasty was poor and weak.

Another serious weakness in national defense of the Song Dynasty was lack of resources. In terms of terrain, the Yellow River basin is all plain, as is the topography north of the Great Wall. Cavalry was essential for warfare in the north, particularly so in resisting the tribes from the north of the Great Wall. In the whole of China, only two places produced cavalry horses: the wild land of Rehe and Chahar in the northeast and the Ganzhou, Liangzhou, and Hetao areas in the northwest. Cavalry horses had to be raised in cold, high-altitude regions and in herds, not separately, so that they were able to chase enemies over long distances. Regions with high mountains, deep valleys, rich grass, sweet spring water, and open space are needed to raise and train cavalry horses. These two regions were grabbed away, respectively by the Liao and the Western Xia (1038–1227) dynasties at the beginning of the Song Dynasty. Iron, a resource related to cavalry, was also in short supply. All the good iron mines were located outside the Great Wall in the northeast. That was another weak point of the Song.

When Wang Anshi initiated the farmer-soldier system as a reform measure, he also took note of horse-raising. It was difficult to raise horses in the central areas of the country. Contemporary observers estimated that the land needed to raise one horse could produce enough grain for 25 people. This was a serious shortcoming for an agrarian society preparing for war. Wang Anshi had no choice but made a policy requiring farming families to raise horses, one horse per household. The farmers welcomed the policy initially, because they had free use of the horses as draft animals in times of peace. They were meant for government use only in times of war. They were unaware that horses were prone to illnesses, even death, in a warm and damp climate. They had to compensate the government for any loss. Thus, horse-raising became a bitter business. The government insisted and the policy became very unpopular. Actually, even had the policy worked, the horses raised in this manner would be weak and unfit for battle. Its failure highlights the tremendous difficulties the Song Dynasty faced in national defense.

As for strategic positions south of the Great Wall, the region stretching from the Juyong Pass to the Shanhai Pass was already in the hands of the Liao. What if the

Liao troops marched south? The Chanyuan Peace Accord with the Liao Dynasty was made by Emperor Zhenzong (r. 997–1022) under such circumstances. The national defense of the Song Dynasty was really pitiable after the Accord. Without official declaration of war, the Song Dynasty was not in a position to deploy a defense line. The government could only encourage farmers in the border areas to open up paddy fields and build irrigation canals. It also instructed farmers to plant elms and birches on the banks of the canals, so that the trees could help hold back the massed cavalry troops of the Liao in time of war. It was a pathetic ploy, one born of desperation. It was seen through immediately by the Liao Dynasty, so it forbade the Song farmers from digging canals and planting of paddy rice. In winter, small groups of Liao troops would raid border villages, preventing the Song ever creating a defense line. As the Liao maintained its threat to invade the Song anytime they wanted, the latter was forced to keep the Peace Accord.

Only the Yanmen Pass area in Shanxi (Province) to the north of Taiyuan (City) provided a defense zone inside the Great Wall. It was the zone safeguarded by the Yang family (a family of heroic generals). However, the Yanmen zone was only secondary in terms of defense. The more important defense area was Hebei (Province), which had no natural barrier apart from the Juma River near Zhuozhou (City). It could hardly function as a defense line. Down to the south lay the capital city of Kaifeng. To the south of Kaifeng was the hilly terrain on the northern and southern banks of the Huai River, which was different to the great expanses of plain of the Yellow River basin. The terrain was even more different than that south of the Yangtze River. It enabled the Southern Song Dynasty to rely on the Yangtze and the Huai rivers as defense lines.

We should not blame the Song Dynasty for all its weaknesses in national defense. Of course, had the Song had an ambitious and capable Emperor, national defense should have been offensive in nature, given its basic defense conditions. Only by proactive offense could the Song maintain defense. Only successful offense could have helped the Song survive, which was the prerequisite to other policies and systems. In reality, the Song protected the country by defense, and poor defense for that matter. It was bound to fail. Other systems, designed to suit the circumstances, were naturally problematic.

As a matter of fact, since ancient times, China had always maintained its status as a country by proactive offense. For example, the First Emperor of Qin (r. 246–210 BC) built the Great Wall, starting from the Datong River in the east and extending all the way west to today's Iron Bridge on the Yellow River in Lanzhou of Gansu Province. How could the Juma River of the Song Dynasty be comparable? Even with the Great Wall in place, defense should be offensive in nature. This is why Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC) of the Han Dynasty pushed his defense line beyond the Great Wall by proactively attacking the Huns. Song military defense was completely passive in nature, but there was the excuse of learning lessons from Tang by limiting the power of the military. Unable to attack, unable to defend, and with its army incompetent and yet indispensable, the Song Dynasty only managed to survive under such a defenseless defense. Fortunately, the dynasty attached special importance to scholars. Therefore, even with poor military management, the Song revived civil administration. There were no serious problems in internal administration. Such were the merits and demerits of the Song.

Glossary

Administration Hall	政事堂 Zhengshitang
Army Commander	督军 Dujun
Assessment Department	考课院 Kaokeyuan
Auditing Department	审官院 Shenguan yuan
Central Supervisor	御史丞
Chanyuan Peace Accord	澶渊之盟 Chanyuanzhimeng
Deputy Prime Minister	御史大夫 Yushidafu
Draft Order	箭 (子) Zhazi
economic prefecture	监 Jian
Executive Ministry	尚书省 Shangshusheng
Exhorter	正言 Zhengyan
farmer-soldier system	保甲制 Baojiazhi
Financial Supervisor	漕 Cao
Hall Orders	堂帖 Tangtie
Heads of Court Guards	都检点 Dujiandian
Imperial Academy	太学 Taixue
imperial decrees	敕命 Chiming
Imperial Gateman	光禄勋 Guangluxun
Imperial Supervisors	谏议大夫 Jianyidafu
Imperial Troops	禁军 Jinjun
Judicial Supervisor	宪 Xian
Landlord	蔷夫 Qiangfu
Local Troops	厢军 Xiangjun
Managing County Magistrate	知县 Zhixian
managing Prefect	知府 (知某府事) Zhifu / 知州 (知某州事) Zhizhou
Mercenary system	佣兵 Yongbing
Military Assessment Department	三班院 Sanbanyuan
military prefecture	军 Jun
Military Supervisor	帅 Shuai
Military Zones	藩镇 Fanzhen
Ministry of Military Affairs	枢密院 Shumiyuan
Ministry of Personnel	吏部 Libu
Ministry of Review	门下省 Menxiasheng
Ministry of Rituals	礼部 Libu
Ministry of Supervision	御史台 Yushitai
national military service system	民兵 Minbing
Nine High Officials	九卿 Jiuqing
one-whip taxation (system)	一条鞭法 Yitiaobianfa
<i>Outlaws of the Marshes</i>	《水浒传》 Shuihuzhuan
Police Head	游徼 Youjiao
prefecture	府 Fu

pre-reading	公卷 Gongjuan
public evaluation	通榜 Tongbang
Ready Draft	熟状 Shuzhuang
Recruits	配军 Peijun
Rectifier	补阙 Buque
Region	道 Dao
Region	路 Lu
Relief Supervisor	仓 Cang
Reminder	拾遗 Shiyi
Remonstrating Officials	谏官 Jianguan
Remonstrator	司谏 Sijian
Reviewer	给事中 Jishizhong
Secondary Deputy Prime Minister	御史中丞 Yushizhongcheng
Secretariat	中书省 Zhongshusheng
special prefecture	州 Zhou
Supervisor	观察使 Guanchashi
Supervisor	监司官 Jiansiguan
the First Emperor of Qin	秦始皇 Qinshihuang
the mercenary system	募兵制 Mubingzhi
Three Elders	三老 Sanlao
Tri-tax System	租庸调制 Zuyongdiaozhi
Two-season Taxation System	两税制 Liangshuizhi

Chapter 4

The Ming Dynasty



4.1 Government Organization of the Ming Dynasty

4.1.1 *The Central Government*

The Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) was the beginning of China's modern history, which coincides with the world's modern history. During the six centuries, or more than 500 years, between the Ming and the present day, China has experienced a new era of modern history, as has Europe in the West. The Ming was followed by the Qing Dynasty (1616–1911). To understand the latter, we need to first understand the Ming, which was the beginning of modern China. Regrettably, while the West progressed in this period of history, China actually regressed, in terms of political system at least. And great regression it was.

The criticism of Chinese traditional politics as autocratic, with the government controlled by the Emperor, is valid when directed at the Ming and Qing dynasties. In the Han (206 BC–AD 220), Tang (AD 618–907), and Song (960–1279) dynasties, the Emperor and the Prime Minister had separate powers, as dictated by the organization of the central government. Their respective shares of power might be different, but the Emperor did not have the final say in everything. In the Ming Dynasty, Emperor Taizu (r. 1368–1398) abolished the position of the Prime Minister in the 13th year of his reign, because the Prime Minister Hu Weiyong (?–1380) attempted a coup, as recorded in the official history. Emperor Taizu also left word that his children and their children must never re-establish the position of Prime Minister. Therefore, there was no Prime Minister in the Ming government, and not in the Qing Dynasty, either. That's why we say the Ming's abolition of the Prime Ministerial role marked a dramatic change in China's traditional politics.

How was the Ming government organized without a Prime Minister? Back in the Tang, the central government had three ministries, the Secretariat, the Ministry of Review, and the Executive Ministry. In the Song Dynasty, the Ministry of Review did not have real power. The Reviewers (staff in this ministry) were much like Remon-

strating Officials, who always stood against the Prime Minister but were not entitled to comment on or refute an imperial decree. Only the head of the Secretariat acted as the Prime Minister, and this remained the case in the Yuan Dynasty (1206–1368) and into the Ming, until Emperor Taizu abolished the Secretariat altogether. He kept the Secretaries (staff of the Secretariat), but their position was only the seventh rank and their job was that of archivists. In the Tang Dynasty, the Secretaries were responsible for drafting decrees for the Emperor, but now (in the Ming Dynasty) they were mere copiers and archivists. The Reviewers in the Ming were also of the seventh rank, but were entitled to refute an imperial decree.

The Secretariat and the Ministry of Review were both abolished in the Ming. Although the Executive Ministry remained, no Executive Minister was placed to head it, nor was there a Left or Right Deputy Executive Minister, as had been the case in the Tang and Song dynasties. Without a Minister, this ministry was instead run as six separate departments, thus the name Six-department Executive Ministry. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the first sub-division under each of the Six Departments was called by the name of that Department, like Household and Personnel divisions under their respective departments. The same was true with the Rituals, Military, Judiciary, and Works departments. At the ministerial level, there were the Minister and his Left and Right Deputy Ministers. Now (in the Ming) the head of the first sub-division under each department became the virtual director of that department. The Six-department Executive Ministry had six directors, instead of one minister. None of the six department directors were subordinate to one another. They were all second-ranking officials, the highest level in the Ming government.

Besides, there was the Department of Supervision, which was evolved from its Tang equivalent. It focused on supervision and impeachment. All the government work was under the supervision of this department. The head of this department and those of the Six Departments were collectively known as the Seven High Officials.

Aside from the Seven High Officials were the Department of Archives and the Court of Judicial Review. Their directors plus the Seven High Officials were collectively called the Nine High Officials. The Department of Archives collected all the government documents intended for the throne from across the country and submitted them to the Emperor. The Court of Judicial Review took care of difficult cases and was responsible for redressing wrongly judged ones. The Judiciary Department, the Department of Supervision, and the Court of Judicial Review were collectively known as the Three Law Departments. All cases deemed of certain importance by the government had to be jointly examined by the Three Law Departments.

Of the Nine High Officials, the first seven were much more important than the last two. There was no one of Prime Ministerial status above them, so the Ming government was under the administration of many departments of equal status: the Judiciary Department was equal to the Personnel Department, which was equal to the Household Department, and so on. Heads of these departments all had the same ranking, with only the Emperor immediately above them.

In terms of military administration, the Ming had five military regions, each headed by a Regional Commander-in-Chief. (The Tang Dynasty had 16 military gar-

risons.) They were only responsible for leading the army in battle, not for dispatching or mobilizing the troops, which was the responsibility of the Military Department.

Such arrangement of the Ming government meant that all important powers were concentrated in the hands of the Emperor. When we compare this structure with traditional government of the Han, Tang, and Song, we can see how important the Prime Minister's powers and responsibilities had been. Even though the (Ming) Emperor held all powers, there were still historical traditions to follow and not everything was decided by him. Many matters were settled through Court Recommendation (of high officials), Court Discussion (about important matters), and Court Investigation (into major cases). At the time, low-level officials were appointed by the Personnel Department, but high-level ones had to be collectively recommended by the Seven or the Nine High Officials, sometimes with input from General Governors and Regional Supervisors from outside the capital. This was called Court Recommendation. Important issues were not dealt with by any single individual department, but had to be collectively decided by the Seven or the Nine High Officials. The process was Court Discussion. Court Investigation refers to the collective hearing of major legal cases that the Three Law Departments found difficult to decide. Collective decision-making by court officials existed as early as the Han Dynasty and was frequently recorded in official history. We can see that the Ming Emperor did not dictate everything all by himself.

As for Reviewers, they were important officials in the Ming Dynasty, even though they only occupied the seventh rank (out of nine). The Reviewers were appointed under the Six Departments of the Executive Ministry (which had no minister or deputy ministers), so there were Household Reviewers, Military Reviewers, Rituals Reviewers, and so on. Roughly speaking, those with financial ability would be assigned to the Household Department, those with military ability to the Military Department, and so on. An imperial decree had to pass through the Six Departments and all their Reviewers were entitled to refute it. For example, when a decree concerning finance was handed to the Household Department, the Household Reviewers would examine it and raise their opinions. They were like members of think tanks in present-day Western governments. The Reviewers would return a decree if they disagreed with its content. Without a superior above them, the Reviewers were free to express their individual opinions. They were also entitled to attend Court Recommendation, Court Discussion, and Court Investigation, and their views were usually respected. If they disagreed on an issue, known as Reviewer's Disagreement, the Six Departments would have no choice but to put the issue aside. The procedure functioned as a check on the Emperor's powers.

4.1.2 The Imperial Cabinet

In general, the Ming Emperor had the final say in all matters. As the Emperor could not possibly attend to everything all by himself, we shall now talk about his secretariat. In the Ming, it was called the Cabinet and the secretaries were called Cabinet Grand

Scholars or Cabinet Scholars. The Emperor attended state affairs in the imperial palace, so there were offices within the palace for his secretaries. These were the Zhongji, Jianji, Wenhua, and Wuying Halls, and the Wenyuan and East Studios. The Cabinet Scholars, being the fifth rank, were not high in official status and they came after Executive Ministry officials when reporting work to the Emperor at court.

Now, what were the responsibilities of these Grand Scholars? They acted as consultants to Emperor Taizu. The Emperor would consult them when he had questions about something and listen to what they had to say. Commenting on reports to the throne used to be the job of the Prime Minister when that post existed. Now it was the Emperor's job and he could not possibly write on all the reports, so he dictated his comments to the Cabinet Scholars. They acted as mere "imperial brushes," writing down whatever the Emperor said. Therefore, the Cabinet Scholars were no more than private secretaries of the Emperor. Political power rested with the Emperor, not the Cabinet Scholars.

According to records of the time, in the eight days (from 14th to 21st) of the ninth lunar month of the 17th year of the Hongwu Reign (1368–1398), 1160 reports from the central and local governments were submitted to the Imperial Palace. Some reports covered only one issue, others covered two or three each, which added up to 3291 issues. The large number of documents was due to the fact that China was a big country and that the central government needed to know and to deal with everything. Early in the reign of the First Emperor of Qin (r. 246–210 BC), government documents were weighed on scales and the Emperor needed to review a certain amount of them, usually deep into the night. One can easily imagine the amount of documents in the Ming Dynasty. Back then, modern Britain and France had not yet taken shape. Spain and Portugal were very small countries, and the scale of their political administration was naturally too small to compare with that of China. In such a large country, it was naturally very difficult for the Emperor to review every single report on government affairs.

Let's take a look at the Forbidden City in Beijing (Beijing). The three great halls in the front (southern) part of the City all served as venues where the Emperor met with officials to deal with state affairs. The halls in the rear (northern) part, such as the Qianqing Palace, were the Emperor's living quarters. It was quite a long distance for him to proceed from the rear section to the front. Beijing is already starting to freeze in the 9th lunar month (late fall) and the thaw does not set in until the 2nd or 3rd lunar month (spring) of the following year. The weather is even colder in the early morning, and according to government tradition, the morning court session had to take place before sunrise. This meant that the Emperor had to rise before dawn and the morning court session would be dismissed when the sun rose. Most officials lived outside the Forbidden City, some as far away as Luomashi Street outside the Qianmen Gate. Thus they usually had to set out between one and five o'clock in the morning, on horseback, with a servant holding a lantern to lead the way. At the (southern) gate of the Forbidden City, they had to dismount and walk, with the exception of only few. Once they arrived at the hall for the court meeting, they must wait quietly in the side rooms for the Emperor to arrive. It was usually before daybreak when he did. There

were no efficient heaters like today: in cold weather, the hall would be warmed by simple charcoal braziers, which were really just for show, not effectiveness.

According to the Ming system, the Emperor had to meet with officials and sometimes the common people three times every day; these were known as the morning, noon, and afternoon court sessions. There were two types of sessions, respectively at the Imperial Hall and the Imperial Gate. The Imperial Hall was also called the Inner Court, where the Emperor and the officials met to discuss state affairs within one of the three great halls. Imperial Gate referred to the Fengtian Gate, which was a huge balcony or podium where the common people could see the Emperor and speak to him. Present-day Western countries still have the practice of addressing large assemblies from a balcony. We call this a democratic political style. In the Qing Dynasty, the Wumen Gate (the southern entrance of the Forbidden City) was the balcony intended for the Emperor to meet the common people. The Qing Emperors did not actually use it for the purpose, but the Ming Emperors did. It was really grueling for the Emperor to hold three court sessions every day.

The founding Emperor Taizu used to be a monk in the Huangjue Buddhist Monastery, where he did such chores as sweeping the place and carrying water. He had the physical strength to act as an autocratic Emperor. Emperor Chengzu (r. 1402–1424) also fought his way to the throne. He was allotted a fiefdom in Beijing, not as crown prince resident in the Ming capital Nanjing (in present-day Jiangsu Province), but he fought all the way to Nanjing and usurped the throne. He too had the physical strength to handle all state affairs in person. His successor and the future heirs to the throne grew up in the Imperial Palace.¹ Their physical strength deteriorated and they were unable to follow their forefathers' example, even the routine of three court sessions a day. If they failed to meet officials the first day, they could not give relevant instructions on certain issues the next day. It would not do to make the civil and military officials wait while the Emperor took the time to review documents of the day before, nor was it right for the Emperor to fail to respond to what the officials had to say. Gradually the Emperors got lazier and lazier, allowing the Cabinet to handle state affairs. Thus, the Cabinet became a power organization.

Although the Cabinet was a powerful organization, the Cabinet Scholars occupied only fifth-level rank. The position was usually held concurrently by the heads of the Six Departments of the Executive Ministry. In other words, the low-level position was concurrently held by high-level officials. As in the Song Dynasty, the Emperor and princes had court teachers to guide their learning. When the court teachers became concurrently Cabinet Scholars, their relationship with the Emperor was naturally both respectful and intimate. Since the Cabinet Scholars (the Emperor's private secretaries) were concurrently heads of the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry or former teachers of the Emperor, their position was dignified. Yet the position of Cabinet Scholar always remained a secondary one, as shown by such titles as Military Director of the Executive Ministry Concurrently Cabinet Scholar of the Wuying Hall, etc. Military Director of the Executive Department was the main job, whereas Cabinet Scholar was only a concurrent title. Cabinet Scholars remained

¹Emperor Chengzu moved the capital to Beijing in 1421.

at the fifth rank of officialdom right to the end of the Ming Dynasty. This part-time position, however, entitled them to stand ahead of the other heads of the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry when attending court sessions with the Emperor. According to the system, his importance as an official came from his main job, not the secondary one. As far as the system for appointing officials was concerned, Cabinet Scholars of the Ming were not at all on a par with the Prime Minister of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties.

Despite their low ranking, Cabinet Scholars had huge power in the government. All reports to the throne, government affairs, and the Emperor's comments and instructions were handled by them. During the reigns of Emperors Taizu and Chengzu, who made decisions by themselves, the Cabinet Scholars simply acted as secretaries writing down what the Emperor had to say. Later Ming Emperors, being young and inexperienced on ascending the throne, had to consult the Cabinet Scholars on everything, and often, because of his ignorance, the Emperor would often avoid meeting with them. What happened was, the Scholars would read all the reports to the throne, write their opinions on a slip of paper, attach it to the report, and submit the reports to the Emperor. The Emperor, not emerging from the Inner Palace, would read the reports and the attached opinions, which were called "draft decrees written on a slip of paper." Once the Emperor had given thought to those opinions, he would tear up the slips and write his comments or instructions in red ink. Only documents "approved in red" were issued as official decrees.

In the Tang Dynasty, all government policies and orders were drafted by the Prime Minister for the Emperor to review and approve. In the Song Dynasty, the Prime Minister would submit draft decrees for the Emperor to approve or revise and then the Prime Minister would draft the official decrees. Now in the Ming, the Emperor personally wrote the decrees. The Grand Scholars only assisted him in private. All the responsibility rested with the Emperor. There was no remedy if he neglected his duties. The Reviewers were supposed to correct the Emperor. But, given their low official position, how could they go against the Emperor's will? Therefore, the Emperor could be said to be an autocrat under the Ming system. Still, when there were major issues to deal with, the Emperor would discuss them with the Grand Scholars at either the Wenhua or Wuying Hall. It was minor issues that were left with the Cabinet: the Grand Scholars stuck notes to the relevant reports and submitted them to the Emperor, who took his time reviewing and approving them in the Inner Palace.

We know that the Ming lasted for nearly three centuries. In its early years, the Emperor would exercise administration at the Cabinet. Later Emperors came to the Cabinet less and less often; they would deal with state affairs by reading "draft decrees written on slips of paper" by the Cabinet. A few of them went so far as to neglect state affairs altogether. The more they neglected their duties, the less they were capable of handling state affairs, and the more reluctant they were to meet with the court officials. With the passage of time, they ended up not going to the Cabinet at all and all government documents had to be delivered to the Inner Palace. The most notorious of all was Emperor Wanli (posthumously honored as Shenzong), who held no court session at all for more than 20 years during the course of his reign from 1572 to 1620. Some government officials never had a chance to meet His Majesty

at all. Contemporary rumor had it that Emperor Wanli was addicted to opium. This cannot be confirmed, but it is very likely true. For 167 years from the Chenghua reign of Emperor Xianzong (r. 1464–1487) to the Tianqi reign of Emperor Xizong (r. 1620–1627), those Emperors never summoned a court session. However, they were not entirely to blame, given the limitation of their physical and intellectual capability. Confined deep inside the Imperial Palace, how challenging it must have been for them to deal with all the state affairs. No wonder they were afraid to take responsibility, lazy, and refused to appear at the court sessions. We should really blame Emperor Taizu for establishing the system that abolished the position of the Prime Minister and put the Emperor in an autocratic position. That system was completely undesirable.

Now that the Emperor did not meet with the Cabinet as often as he should, the situation left opportunities for the eunuchs to act fraudulently. The Emperor would give his instructions or orders to the eunuchs, who were supposed to pass them on to the Cabinet, and vice versa. Gradually the eunuchs encroached on state power. To save himself trouble, the Emperor would sometimes privately allow the eunuchs to write instructions on government documents in red. The imperial power of approving government documents thus fell into the hands of the eunuchs, who actually exercised the power of the Emperor and had the final say in all top-level government affairs. When even the eunuchs grew tired of approving documents, they would use them as waste paper for wrapping fish and meat. Such extreme dark and corrupt governance made Ming egregious among all the dynasties in history.

When the Ming system was at its worst, the head eunuch, titled Rituals Supervisor, was the *de facto* Prime Minister, even the *de facto* Emperor. When Emperor Taizu established the system, he abolished the position of Prime Minister. But he did foresee the possibility of eunuchs interfering in state affairs, and for this reason had an iron plaque cast and hung in front of the palace gate in 1384. This bore the warning words: “No interference in state affairs by eunuchs.” Clearly, Emperor Taizu knew that without a Prime Minister, eunuchs would manipulate power, given their easy access to an autocratic Emperor. Emperor Wu (r. 141–87 BC) of the Han Dynasty did something similar. Since he had kept the power of the Prime Minister within the imperial family, before he died he had the mother of his under-age heir killed, lest she should meddle in state affairs after his own demise. These two emperors foresaw the harmful results of their arrangements. Emperor Taizu’s descendants followed his decree not to have a Prime Minister to the very end, but they neglected his order not to allow eunuchs to interfere in state affairs. How could he foresee that eunuch interference in state affairs would be worse under the Ming than in any of the other dynasties?

Under such circumstances, officials without access to the Emperor, such as the Grand Scholars of the Cabinet, had no way of doing anything important, unless by collaborating with the eunuchs. Since they could not meet with the Emperor, they would have no channel to report state affairs to him, unless via the eunuchs. The famous Grand Scholar Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582) was a typical example. As one of the great statesmen held in esteem by modern scholars, Zhang had to collaborate with the eunuchs in order to exercise power. Zhang was the teacher

of Emperor Shenzong when he was still the Crown Prince. But now the teacher could not see his student, despite his position as a Grand Scholar. Grand Scholars, according to the Ming system, were not entitled to initiate state policies. Therefore, Zhang had to collude with the Rituals Supervisor in order to turn his ambitions into action, that is, to initiate state policies. However, he met with resistance from all the other court officials, on the grounds that he was not the same as Prime Ministers in former dynasties and so should not exercise power. The criticism was well founded, because the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry were the top government organizations. They only took orders from the Emperor, not from the Cabinet. When any conflict occurred between the Cabinet and the Six Departments, the latter would retort: You are not the Prime Minister, not even a court official, and so have no right to interfere with our business.

A court official would be accused of overstepping his authority if he meddled in affairs or use powers beyond his remit. Traditional Chinese politics drew a distinct line between overstepping and exercising power by officials. Court officials enjoyed their proper status under the existing system. Under the traditional Chinese political system, the Prime Minister was entitled to all-encompassing administrative power and he should oversee the handling of all state affairs. Otherwise, he would be neglecting his duties or simply incompetent. An official not in the position of the Prime Minister would be accused of overstepping power or even as treacherous if he interfered with state affairs or used powers in the domain of the Prime Minister. Overstepping power by officials went against traditional political morals as well as state laws.

Under the Ming system, there was no such a position as Prime Minister. The directors of the Six Departments under the Executive Ministry, together with the directors of the Department of Supervision, the Department of Archives and the Court of Judicial Review, were court officials true to their titles. The logic of those who opposed Zhang Juzheng was like this: Directors of the Six Departments and the Department of Supervision are entitled to handle state affairs and are only responsible to the Emperor. As a Grand Scholar, you (Zhang) are only a private consultant to the Emperor. It is your duty to “discuss your ideas at ease” with the Emperor, but you are overstepping your powers if you take advantage of this relationship to interfere with affairs of the Six Departments and the Department of Supervision.

Since Zhang Juzheng was bent on taking state affairs into his own hands, he required all the government departments to prepare duplicates of reports to the throne, one set for the Cabinet and the other for the Reviewers of the Six Departments. He was in the wrong again. It was appropriate for the Reviewers to go through the reports, because the existing law entitled them to do so, even though their official position ranked rather low. The Cabinet, on the other hand, was not entitled to involvement in state affairs, except when the Emperor specifically wanted this. Therefore, Zhang Juzheng had no argument to refute those who were opposed to him. He had no choice but to ask permission to resign. He said he “was situated in a dangerous position, took care of affairs and spoke on behalf of the Emperor.” What he said may be true, but was there ever an official decree to appoint him as the agent of the Emperor?

According to Chinese political traditions, the Emperor should not interfere with the Prime Minister's powers. That was the situation in the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties, which we have already discussed in detail. In the Ming Dynasty, however, it was wrong for the Cabinet to interfere with the Emperor's powers, as regulated by law. On this point, even Zhang Juzheng could not defend himself against his opponents. People today regard Zhang Juzheng as a great statesman for upholding rule of law, without knowing the real situation of his time. Zhang actually violated the law, the principal law of the state, in his action. Wasn't it extreme violation of the law when he took into his own hands the powers of the Emperor? If Zhang had acted in the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties the way he did in the Ming, he would have made an excellent Prime Minister. Under the Ming system, he was only a Grand Scholar of the Cabinet, not the top leader of the government, and so he should not have acted as a Prime Minister. This was the legal principle of the Ming Dynasty, which was different from the traditions of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties.

Soon after his death, Zhang Juzheng's home was searched and his property confiscated. That happened despite the fact that he had made huge contributions to the Ming Dynasty. Contemporary political opinions on Zhang were all negative, precisely because he had overstepped, not exercised, power. The verdict that he overstepped power was determined by his unjustified position in the government, not by his achievements. That people today advocate rule of law and take Zhang Juzheng as an example at the same time, is simply because they have no understanding of the Ming political system. Instead of correcting the Ming system, which was very different from those of the Han, Tang, and Song dynasties, Zhang went against the system in his political endeavors. By resorting to expedient means to achieve his goals, he caused more problems than benefits in terms of political influence. This brings us to our conclusion in terms of system and legal principles, not in terms of Zhang's contributions and intentions. At least his opponents thought along these lines. I have discussed this in detail because I want to explain how a system restrains personnel arrangement. We can also be certain that the Ming system was faulty in its abolition of the Prime Ministerial position.

4.1.3 Local Governments of the Ming Dynasty

Local politics was one of the most important issues in Chinese political history. Because of China's huge territory, local administration was of crucial importance. After the fall of the Ming Dynasty, two great historians reflected on the painful lessons to be drawn from the Ming political system and on how politics could be improved in the future. One of them was Huang Zongxi (1610–1695, also known as Huang Lizhou). In *Critique on Past Dynasties*, Huang paid the greatest attention to Ming's abolition of the Prime Ministerial position. Huang believed that the Prime Minister must be established in his proper title and capacity. The government must be headed by the Prime Minister, not by the Emperor himself. The other historian was Gu Yanwu (1613–1682, also known as Gu Tinglin), who wrote *Collection of*

Book Reviews. In Gu's words, when the country was in peace, there must be many minor officials and a small number of major ones; when the country fell in chaos, there must have been many high officials and a small number of low-level ones. He cited many examples from history to support his view. All in all, he believed that the country would enjoy peace when local politics was well run, and that the country would fall in chaos when the converse was true. The two scholars focused on different levels of the Ming political system, Huang on the top level and Gu on the lower ones. If we take a close look at the entire history of Chinese politics, it is clear that both correctly pinpointed the lessons to be drawn.

In terms of Chinese traditional history, the Han Dynasty ran the best local governments. The local administration of the Tang Dynasty was not bad, either. Let me give an illustrative example. In such a large country as China, it is not difficult to communicate government decrees today, given such facilities as airplanes, trains, and telegraphs. In ancient times, transportation entirely relied on courier stations. It was no easy job. In the Tang Dynasty, courier stations were built throughout the country. We imagine it must have been difficult for a government decree to be carried from the capital Chang'an (in present-day Shaanxi Province) to Panyu (in present-day Guangdong Province), Hangzhou (in present-day Zhejiang Province), or Fuzhou (in present-day Fujian Province). But actually, government affairs back then were not too much hampered by long distances and difficulties in transportation. Government documents were classified into urgent or regular types, like today's urgent and regular telegraphs. There were regulations on the distance a horse should cover in an hour and how much time it should take between posts, depending on the type of documents being carried. All the stations were staffed. When the courier arrived, he would find food and drink prepared for him. Having eaten and drunk and taken a break, he would hit the road again on a well-fed horse. There were regulations on where he should spend the first night, the second night, etc. The regulations ensured that the couriers arrived at their destinations within the specified time limits. Today modern science allows us to communicate via telegraph, but the Tang government had to rely on men and horses. Every day, the Departments of Household, Personnel, Executive, etc., all had documents to dispatch to different localities. Horses came and went like flowing streams. Just as trains and ships can have delays, it was even more natural for the couriers to have delays. Still, they would arrive more or less within the time limits. Otherwise, state affairs would fall into chaos and the government would collapse. Just this one example can serve to refute the popular saying that the Chinese people have always had a poor sense of time. It is reasonable to assume that the larger the space, the greater the demand on time management. If the Chinese had no sense of time, they would not have been able to run such a large country.

As for the courier stations, they were elaborately built, complete with ornamental rocks, ponds, pavilions, lounges, bathing rooms, and stables. When the courier arrived at a station, he was ensured of a good night's sleep so he could start his next day's journey reenergized, or he could have a brief, reinvigorating break for an hour or two. The station would also have a new horse for him. Horses too were classified according to speed. First-class urgent documents would be matched with a top-speed horse. The staff at courier stations in remote mountains and poor valleys would never fail the

couriers in their journeys. This example also demonstrates the high administrative efficiency of the time. The credit for this should go to the local governments, not to the central government, the Prime Minister, or the directors of the Departments of Works and Executive.

Gu Yanwu visited many places. Every time he traveled on a big road, smoothly surfaced and built on a solid base, inquiry would mostly likely reveal it to have been built in the Tang Dynasty. Every time he entered a big city built with thick, solid city walls and in magnificent style, inquiry would most likely reveal it to have been built in the Tang. The numerous ruins of Tang-dynasty courier stations visited by Gu reminded him of the scale of the Tang Dynasty. His observations in *Collection of Book Reviews* are very akin to what modern Europeans admire about the ruins of Rome. Whereas the Roman Empire was built by force and its facilities were also built for military purposes, the facilities of the Tang Dynasty represented the sophistication of local governments. Besides this difference, Gu was not praising the Tang Dynasty as an archaeologist. His observations were intended to highlight the contrasting reality of the Ming. So, let us now talk about local administration under the Ming Dynasty.

4.1.4 Provinces Since the Yuan and Ming Dynasties

When talking about local administration under the Ming Dynasty, we should first and foremost mention the so-called provinces, a term still in use today. The administrative system of provinces was established in the Yuan Dynasty, but first appeared in the Jin Dynasty (1115–1234). Today, Jiangsu Province and Zhejiang Province, and the like, are place names. In history, they were names of government departments. In the Yuan and Jin dynasties, the Secretariat was the office of the Prime Minister and was usually referred to as Prime Secretariat.² When the Prime Secretariat dispatched an office to a local place, it was called a Branch Secretariat.

This was because the Mongols, having won rule over the whole of China, were reluctant to delegate power to local governments. Instead, they concentrated state power at the central government level. When anything went amiss in a locality, the Prime Secretariat would dispatch one or two officials to suppress it. A Branch Secretariat was like a mobile Prime Secretariat. (In earlier dynasties) the Ministry of Supervision would dispatch officials to supervise local administration. They would travel between places and represented a mobile Supervision Department. As the top government organization, how could the Secretariat of the Yuan Dynasty establish branches in Jiangsu Province and Guangdong Province, and the like? This Yuan system, a most unreasonable arrangement, came about because the Mongols, as new rulers of China, were reluctant to delegate power to local governments. The same was true with the Jin Dynasty, which had created the system in the first place. The main reason was that the Jin and Yuan governments did not trust the local governments

²In this context, the same Chinese character 省 was used to mean both “secretariat” and “province.” “Province” is the modern meaning.

and so did not delegate power to them. Therefore, even local political affairs were handled by central government officials in person.

Hong Kong (at the present time of writing) and India in the near past are recent examples. Britain has a Governor there as the top administrator. The Governor is directly responsible to the throne. In name, the Governor of a colony represents the throne of Britain, not the cabinet. That is because the cabinet represents the parliament and the parliament represents the will of the people. People under colonial rule do not enjoy free will. There is democracy and autonomy in the land of Britain, but not in Hong Kong or its colonies such as India. Therefore, the colonies should not have local administrators. They have to be ruled by a Governor, a person dispatched by the monarch.

We can see that every system has certain meanings lying beneath the surface. The Branch Secretariat of the Yuan Dynasty represented the central government in motion. It was dispatched by the Prime Secretariat to administrate a local place. Thus the local governments had no power at all. Power lay with the central government. The Yuan Dynasty had a central government, but no local governments. The Mongols treated China like a conquered land, as Britain treats Hong Kong.

Like the Song Dynasty, the Yuan also divided local administration into regions, prefectures, special prefectures, and counties. In reality, however, local administration was in the hands of Branch Secretariats. The Branch Secretariats were headed by central-government officials sent to handle local affairs. The Yuan Dynasty did not divide the country into several administrative regions. Instead, where there was an official from the Secretariat, it became a Branch Secretariat. Branch Secretariats were not local governments, but representatives of the central government. In other words, the central government encroached upon local administration. When the central government needed to suppress a locality, it sent an official of the same level as the Prime Minister over there. In the Yuan Dynasty, there were ten Branch Secretariats, but they were not the same as local administrative regions. That was the legal basis for the system of provinces.

At a deeper level, such a system of provinces was meant for military control, not to facilitate administration. This was the actual origin of the system in history, which has left its trace even in modern times. For example, the modern-day division of provinces is different from the division of regions in either the Tang or the Song Dynasty. Xuzhou, a city of military importance in Jiangsu Province, is close to Shandong, Henan, and Anhui provinces, which were not under the control of the General Governor or Regional Supervisor of Jiangsu. The same was true of Nanjing, another city of military importance in Jiangsu Province. Its security depended on Guande and Wuhu, which again were not part of Jiangsu. It was the same with every province. In military affairs, none were entirely under the control of their respective administrators, so that all the provinces were divided, making them unable to unite in revolt or to revolt on their own. This was the essence of the system of provinces.

The Ming rulers naturally understood the intention behind this system, inherited from the Yuan Dynasty. They also knew such an establishment was not sensible. Once the Ming Dynasty scrapped the Secretariat, they could not have any Branch Secretariats. The Ming divided the country into 13 Administrative Regions, under

13 Regional Administrative Commissioners. To be precise, these Administrative Regions were not Branch Secretariats or Provinces.

In the Qing Dynasty, a Regional Supervisor and a General Governor were usually placed above the Regional Administrative Commissioner. Regional Supervisor and General Governor were not regular positions in the Ming Dynasty, and so Regional Administrative Commissioners were the top-level local officials. One problem with the Ming Administrative Regions was that they used an improper name 司 (which means “government department”) to refer to “region.” The Qing Dynasty adopted the term province again. For example, Jiangsu had an Administrative Commissioner and a Regional Supervisor, but the region was called Jiangsu Branch Secretariat or Jiangsu Province. Actually, province was an even less appropriate name. It was the standard name in some Qing-dynasty local chronicles. The Qing Dynasty further grouped some provinces together, such as the Three Provinces to the East of Shanhai Pass, the Three Provinces (Guangdong, Guangxi, and Fujian) to the South of Wuling Mountains. Such grouping was utterly meaningless. It confused political geography with natural geography and indeed caused China much trouble in later years. Let’s put aside Guangdong and Guangxi provinces, or the Three Provinces to the South of the Wuling Mountains or simply the Three South Provinces. While the Three South Provinces were referred to separately, the Three East Provinces to the East of the Shanhai Pass were always referred to collectively, because the Qing government prohibited the Han people from moving there. Later on they were simply referred to as the Three East Provinces. As time went by, these three provinces seemed different from other Chinese provinces. People knew them as the Three East Provinces, but were not always aware of the Three South Provinces. Had all provinces been put into groups, the Three East Provinces would not have seemed different. In reality, we wrongly saw them as different.

It was an even more serious mistake to call the Three East Provinces “Manzhou,” which was only a small place near the Changbai Mountain, lying northeast and south of the Songhua River in Jilin Province. Manzhou belonged to the Jianzhou Military Garrison in the Tang Dynasty and the Jianzhou Military Zone in the Ming. This military zone was not the administrative region of the northeastern part of China. The Three East Provinces was both an administrative and geographical term to refer to the northeast. The general public was not aware of the differences, while the Manchu people deliberately exaggerated the territorial idea of their local name. They grouped the Three East Provinces and the Three South Provinces. The names were both unreasonable and confusing. When the Japanese invaded the northeast of China, they deliberately described the Three East Provinces as a different region, as Manzhou, creating huge confusion. When Puyi (r. 1908–1912), the last and overthrown Emperor of the Qing Dynasty, was made puppet Emperor by the Japanese, he claimed the Three East Provinces as “Manzhou State,” as if the Manchu people were ruling the region. But how or when was Manzhou ever synonymous with the Three East Provinces?

According to Confucius (551–479 BC), if a name is not correct or not true to fact to start with, whatever you say will make no sense. Some scholars in the Qing Dynasty suggested using “Administrative Region” (the Chinese term “司”) instead of Branch Secretariat or Province. But then, what to do with the titles of General

Governor and Regional Supervisor? That's why the suggestion was not followed. Branch Secretariat was not a correct name, after all. Even more inappropriate was the so-called "18 Main Provinces." There was no such division between the main and the peripheral areas throughout the history of China. The Great Wall built in the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) already reached as far east as the Datong River, which ensured that the Liao River basin (to the west of the Datong River) was definitely part of Chinese territory. How could this area not be part of the main territory of China? Such misleading differentiation was made up by the foreign race (the Japanese) to confuse fact with falsehood, and as an excuse for invading China.

Today we have such terms as South China, Central China, North China, etc. Are they accurate terms in political geography? We Chinese use them without paying attention to whether they are accurate terms or not. It's of little importance now, in uneventful times, but in 10 or 20 years from now, some political or diplomatic issue might possibly arise. Problems might even occur in our own minds. If some of us regard our part of the country as South China and some of us regard their part as North China, such mindsets would play a big role (should problems occur). Such concern has arisen out of our discussion about the Branch Secretariats of the Yuan Dynasty. We should be aware of the danger implicit in the Yuan system. Branch Secretariat is really an unfortunate name and would be better not used at all in any future division of local administration.

4.1.5 Local Executive, Judiciary, and Military Organizations of the Ming Dynasty

Parallel to the Regional Administrative Commissioners, there were two more high-level local officials, namely, the Regional Judiciary and the Regional Military Commissioners. Together they were called Three Regional Administrative Departments.³ In principle, a Judiciary Commissioner, by whatever title in different dynasties, should travel to different places for supervision, rather than spending a prolonged period in any one place. However, in both the Ming and Qing dynasties, each was permanently based in a region, contrary to the nature of this position. The title of Regional Administrative Commissioner was also inappropriate, since the original Chinese name meant he should be traveling rather than permanently based.

At any rate, the Regional Administrative Commissioner had a deputy and an assistant below him, and the Regional Judiciary Commissioner had a deputy and an assistant as well. When dispatched to localities, these officials represented Sub-departments (below the Regional Administrative Departments). In the Qing Dynasty, they were nicknamed Local Inspectors, like present-day provincial governments sending out senators to assist local administration. Such an arrangement made it very difficult for local governments to run local affairs. Under the Ming system,

³They were called by different Chinese names in the Ming and Qing dynasties, with similar meanings.

the county was the lowest unit of local government, above which was the prefecture, above which was the Administrative Region. There should be only these three levels, but the Sub-departments stretched local administration into four levels. In the Yuan Dynasty, the Branch Secretariat represented the central government in local regions. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, the high-level local governments extended their administration to lower-level localities through the Local Inspectors. Given the large size of the regions, dividing the administrative regions into sub-regions was an understandable move. The Regional Administrative Commissioners and the Regional Judiciary Commissioners had their respective sub-departments in lower-level localities, and their heads were respectively titled Sub-regional Administrative Commissioners and Sub-regional Judiciary Commissioners. Wang Fuzhi (1619–1692, also known as Wang Chuanshan), a great Confucian scholar in the late Ming Dynasty, noted the following statistics in his work *Book of the Yellow Emperor—On the Governance of China*: The region of Shandong had six prefectures and 16 sub-departments; Shanxi had five prefectures with 13 sub-departments; Shaanxi had eight prefectures and 24 sub-departments; Sichuan had nine prefectures and 17 sub-departments. In this way, above the county there was the prefecture, above the prefecture there were the sub-departments, and above the sub-departments there were the regional administrative departments. As a result, there were more officials to administer officials than officials to administer the people. Only the county officials were in touch with the people. Those above them were all administrators of officials. Not only was the number of people-related officials small, they were also at the lowest level.

This is why I describe the local politics as rather poor in the Song Dynasty, where the regional administrators were above the four parallel local supervisors, respectively in charge of military, financial, judicial, and civil affairs. It was even worse in the Ming Dynasty. The Ming regional administration was divided into administration, judiciary, and military. The administration and judiciary departments further branched to lower-level localities. Below all these officials were the prefectures and the counties. The county officials were too low in position and too insignificant. Serving all those officials above them was already too much. How could they have the time or energy to care for the people? Back in the Han Dynasty, the county had only the prefecture above, nothing more. A Prefecture Governor had a salary of 2000 *dan* of grain per year, the same as that for the Nine High Officials (in the central government). A county government usually had several hundred staff. There were more than 100 prefectures in the Han Dynasty. Today, a single province of China may be larger than a country in Europe, but provincial governors are not taken seriously in official circles. The County Magistrates are even less important. This is truly a big problem in politics.

In addition to and above those three regional administrative departments, there were General Governors and Regional Supervisors. It was all right in the Ming Dynasty to have these two positions, because they were dispatched to serve temporarily in times of need and always carried an affiliated title, as envoy of the Central Supervisor (head of the Department of Supervision). That meant they were dispatched by the central government to supervise local affairs, either civil or military. For example, when the Japanese invaded, the coastal regions needed an official,

either a General Governor or a Regional Supervisor, to coordinate overall defense temporarily. When the invasion was checked after a few years, the official would return to the central government, and his local office dissolved. In the Qing Dynasty, the General Governors and Regional Supervisors both became permanent officials above the Regional Administrative Commissioners and Regional Judiciary Commissioners. The result was that local administration went from bad to worse.

If we trace back in history, we can find more examples of temporary positions changing into permanent ones, such as the change of Prefecture Envoy to Prefecture Governor in the Han Dynasty, which further changed to Supervisor in the Tang Dynasty, which had 10 Regions. The Military Supervisors became civil administrators in the Tang Dynasty for the purpose of opening up new frontiers. The General Governors and Regional Supervisors in the Ming and Qing dynasties were established for the purpose of suppressing internal rebellions. It was bad enough for the central government to send officials to govern local affairs, if not for the purpose of expanding the frontiers. It was even worse to deploy a permanent military presence to prevent local unrest. It only demonstrates the failure of local politics, serious failure at that, in the history of Chinese politics.

4.1.6 Officials and Clerks in the Ming and Qing Dynasties

We have just discussed the pressure on local governments from above. There were also problems at the lower levels. The most serious problem was with the clerks in government departments. Traditional Chinese politics distinguished between officials and clerks. Clerks were those who did the routine office work, roughly as is the situation of today. In both the Western (206 BC–AD 25) and Eastern Han (AD 25–220) dynasties, only the head of a government department was an official, while the rest were all clerks. There was little distinction in their backgrounds, and it was not uncommon for a clerk to rise to the position of the Prime Minister. That's why the political ethos of the Han Dynasty was extremely pragmatic. There was already a big difference between officials and clerks in the Tang Dynasty, but the two were not categorically divided.

While the distinction between officials and clerks became categorical in the Ming Dynasty, the origin of the problem should be traced back to the Yuan Dynasty. Officials in the Yuan Dynasty were all Mongols. They had to employ Han people as clerks, because the Mongols had less experience in administrative affairs and could not read Chinese. Having no opportunity of official positions, the native Han scholars applied themselves as clerks in various government agencies. That was the beginning of the differentiation between officials and clerks. During the reign of the Ming founding Emperor Taizu, the shortage of available talents meant that officials were encouraged to recommend them. The imperial government would snap up the candidates, no matter their level of qualification: Jinshi scholar, Jiansheng scholar or clerk. A Jinshi was a qualified candidate in the highest-level recruitment examination for official positions; a Jiansheng was similar to today's undergraduate; a clerk was

someone who ran the routine office work. There was no difference in their status when it came to promotions, despite their different initial qualifications. But it was a matter of expedience. By the reign of Emperor Chengzu, clerks were no longer allowed to hold supervising positions, nor were they allowed to take the highest-level recruitment examination for official positions. That rule limited the career prospects of clerks and set them apart from officials. Such distinction of status in Chinese politics explains why clerks were looked down upon. The concept began in the Yuan Dynasty and was confirmed during Chengzu's reign.

It exerted a huge influence in the history of Chinese politics. There are classes but no distinction of status in Western society, while Chinese society has distinction of status but no classes. This is an important difference between the two societies. The concept of status distinction is still deep in the Chinese psyche. For example, teachers represent a profession. Clerks in government agencies and private advisors to officials also represent a profession. They are different in status, one being nobler and higher than the other. The root lies in the concept of status distinction. Civil and military officials, for another example, might be of the same official level, but there was still a status distinction between them. It is a unique tradition of Chinese society, difficult for Westerners to understand. There is no equivalent conceptual term in Western languages. Only a Chinese mind can understand it. Opera singers represent a profession, as do as farmers, scholars. To our minds, there is another concept about them, the concept of status distinction, besides their professions.

In the view of the Ming government, clerks were of a different (lower) status than officials, which meant they were not eligible to become officials. They were first prevented from taking supervising positions and then from taking the highest-level recruitment examination for official positions. The result was that only those who failed the examinations for officials or those who passed the lowest-level examination but were not offered a commensurate position would become clerks. Despite their low status, clerks had a great influence on politics of their times. The most famous private advisors to officials in modern political circles were those from Shaoxing (in present-day Zhejiang Province). They became influential as early as the Yuan and Ming dynasties, and their power reached all parts of the country. For example, when a friend of Chen Longzheng (?–1645, also known as Chen Jiting), a Neo-Confucianist scholar of the Ming Dynasty, was about to leave for Shaoxing to take up the position of County Magistrate, Chen wrote him a letter about the matter. In short, the letter says, governance of the country, good or bad, depends on the Six Departments (of the central government), and their clerks all come from Shaoxing. While they serve at the central government departments, their fathers and brothers remain in Shaoxing. Once there, you should make a point of educating their family members. Provided fathers and brothers are well edified, the clerks will be duly edified and the country will be well governed. Therefore, governance of the country actually depends on Shaoxing. We can't deny that Chen Longzheng was making a good point.

Some things in history are in plain sight, while others are not so conspicuous. In general, people notice the former, such as how the Prime Minister acted and how the Six Departments functioned. They often fail to notice the non-visible, but equally strong and influential things. Even as late as Emperor Guangxu (r. 1875–1908), this

saying still had currency: It is entirely in the hands of the clerks whether a promotion is quick or slow, a punishment heavy or light, a tax pocketed or properly used, a ceremony upheld or abolished, a life saved or lost, a law suit judged serious or minor, a public work expanded or reduced. The administrative affairs handled by clerks can be summed up as seven kinds: promotion, punishment, tax, ceremony, capital punishment, litigation, and public works. These were the major categories of administrative affairs. The clerks traditionally specialized in these matters. They were professional politicians with specialized knowledge, but they were looked down on in the political circles of their times. They did not take themselves seriously, either, regarding themselves as of low status. Instead of self-discipline, they engaged in malpractices and did all manner of evil.

As we all know, when it came to reporting the investigating of a public issue to one's superior, it could be said to have happened with a cause but without evidence, or to have happened without evidence but with an evil motive. The former would be regarded as a minor case, whereas the latter would be taken as a serious case. All these were decided by the clerks. The local officials in the Ming and Qing dynasties were responsible for managing officials of lower levels, not specific work. They left business in the hands of their private advisors and clerks. There were private advisors in all government agencies and they were all connected with each other. The officials knew nothing about the business of the private advisors and clerks. It would take several months to a year for an official who wanted to do his job seriously to understand the detailed situation of his office. The clerks would inevitably stand against him and go behind his back to create difficulties for him. Such a situation never existed prior to the Ming Dynasty, and by the time of the Qing it was way worse. The root cause was the distinction between officials and clerks. Officials moving above were called "clear flow"; the clerks left at the bottom were called "turbid flow." Once entering the ranks of clerks, they sank into the turbid flow and would never be able to extricate themselves.

At a deeper level, the status distinction in official circles was a law, a system that has gone unnoticed by scholars of political systems. The political tradition of the time emphasized laws, not people. A clerk would always remain a clerk, regardless of his virtue or talent. Consequently, the clerks had no self-respect, no ambition for advancement. But at the same time, they handled all the documents, records, and cases, manipulating opportunities to restrict the officials above them. Even though the officials might be wise and capable, they could do nothing about the clerks. This was a problem of system, not of people. People today criticize the Chinese for lacking respect for law, when, in fact, a traditional problem with Chinese politics has been a rigid fixation on laws. All things had to be handled according to the law. When drawing up a law or regulation, it might have several rounds of revisions just on the choice of a specific word or two, at the cost of delaying work that should be dealt with immediately. Another problem with the clerk politics was red tape, a perennial problem in Chinese traditional politics. The politics of the Western and Eastern Han dynasties placed pragmatism above red tape. The damaging effects of red-tape

politics were most obvious at the lower and bottom levels, especially, local politics. In the Western and Eastern Han dynasties one local official (County Magistrate) had many minor officials (staff) under him, whereas in the Ming and Qing dynasties one minor official (County Magistrate) had many clerks under him. Even though those clerks had no political career prospects, they were the very people who handled the bureaucratic paperwork and laws. What other result could be expected from their influence?

4.2 Imperial Examination for Selecting Officials in the Ming Dynasty

The selection system for officials did not go through much change from the Tang through the Song dynasties. Under the Ming Dynasty, major changes took place and the revised system was followed by the Qing Dynasty. Let's discuss two major changes.

4.2.1 Jinshi Scholars and the Hanlin Academy

Let's begin with qualified Jinshi scholars and the Hanlin Academy. In the Tang and Song dynasties, the local governments selected candidates for official positions from among the common people. Candidates selected by the local governments and submitted to the central government were called Jinshi scholars. Once they passed the central government examination, they were called qualified Jinshi scholars. For example, a native of Shandong who applied to and was recommended by the Shandong provincial government to the central government was a Jinshi scholar of Shandong. He was a qualified Jinshi scholar once he passed the relevant examination. In those dynasties, there was only one major examination. More examinations were added in the Ming Dynasty, because there were many more applicants. The first level of examination took place at the prefecture and county level (presided over by prefecture and county officials). Those who passed were called county scholars or scholars. Supposedly, these scholars should take further studies in their respective counties, but actually there were no county schools. The second examination was at the provincial level, taking place at the provincial capital. Those who passed were called provincial scholars. They went on to take the top-level, or national, examination, organized by the central government. Those who took part in the national examination were called Jinshi scholars and those who passed were called qualified Jinshi scholars. In name, there was no great difference between provincial scholars and Jinshi scholars.

Under the Ming system, qualified Jinshi scholars had to remain at the central government for continued study under the mentorship of a high-level court official, himself a qualified Jinshi scholar previously. He did not teach them how to study, of course. In standard practice, these qualified Jinshi scholars must study for another three years before taking a further examination. Those who passed with high grades would then enter the Hanlin Academy, to become Hanlin scholars. However, this practice of requiring qualified Jinshi scholars to study further became nominal not long afterwards.

The prevailing custom of Ming official circles was to place extreme importance on Jinshi and Hanlin scholars, who were the only eligible candidates for high official positions. In the dynasties before Ming, all qualified Jinshi scholars were eligible for official appointments and were able to climb the career ladder as their performance improved. In the Ming, provincial scholars might not become Jinshi scholars; only qualified Jinshi scholars and those who became Hanlin scholars had any prospect of a high position. Provincial scholars and those below stood no chance at all. This is how the status distinction came about in the selection of would-be officials. Qualified Jinshi scholars belonged to the higher status. They floated above and moved forward. County scholars and provincial scholars belonged to the lower status. They remained at the bottom without any chance of moving up. The top performers in imperial examinations also carried a special status. Therefore, as regards the selection of candidates for official positions we are justified in saying there was no class distinction; but there certainly was status distinction.

From the Han through the Tang and Song dynasties, officials all began their career at the bottom and all could hope to rise to high position. From the Ming Dynasty onward, selection of would-be officials was divided into two tiers. County and provincial scholars at the lower tier had no hope of high positions; these were now the exclusive preserve of Jinshi and Hanlin scholars at the upper level. The same was true in the Qing Dynasty. Take Zeng Guofan (1811–1872) for example. Even though he passed the palace examination with the third grade and was given the academic title of Para-Jinshi scholar, after further study at the central government, Zeng entered the Hanlin Academy with high scores in the relevant examination. He moved on to hold the position of Provincial Education Commissioner for several terms. Then he was promoted to Vice Minister, a position similar to the same title of today. That was a very high position. If a scholar failed to pass the Jinshi qualification or, better still, to become a Hanlin scholar, he would have no hope for high positions, no matter how learned or virtuous he was, or how well he performed in his current position. This kind of system emphasized regulations at the cost of talent.

To be fair, we should recognize that this system was not entirely without merit. Many famous officials of the Ming and Qing dynasties came out of the Hanlin Academy. Qualified Jinshi scholars, through further study at the central government for several years, gradually familiarized themselves with all the practical administrative affairs of the government. Assured of high official positions in the future, they were able to set their mind on improving their learning. During their stay at

the Hanlin Academy, these scholars improved their learning and at the same time acquired much knowledge of politics. Throughout these years they waited quietly for the government to appoint them to important positions. In this way qualified Jinshi scholars and Hanlin scholars served as a guaranteed pool of talent for the government. The selection system for officials only “selected” talent but did not train them, whereas the Jinshi and Hanlin system of the Ming and Qing dynasties actually did. Since officials of such a background usually worked in the central government, their influence was significant.

Again we take Zeng Guofan as an example. His learning was not that great when he qualified as a Jinshi scholar in his early 30s. He stayed in the capital after he passed the Hanlin examination. Life was poor, but his time was his own, enabling him to learn from senior scholars, make friends, read, and exchange ideas with others. It was during that period that his learning became solid. As a Hanlin scholar, he did not have much official obligation and so still had much time to hone his learning. Serving as Provincial Examination Commissioner for several terms, Zeng still did not have much other official responsibility. During his travels to many places, Zeng learned much about local conditions and customs, and made many friends. Then he returned to the Hanlin Academy. It was only after all these years that Zeng was appointed to an official position. Scholars like him were provided for by the state and were assured of high official positions. They were allowed a period of time to learn everything of government in an unhurried manner. It was indeed a good system. In the Ming and Qing dynasties, most great scholars and statesmen were qualified Jinshi or Hanlin scholars. It is untrue to assume that those scholars learned nothing but book knowledge and the skills of writing a good eight-part essay during their long years of study. During the years when they stayed in the capital for further studies, the Jinshi and Hanlin scholars could usually afford only one servant and one horse. They lodged either in a place provided by people from their native area or a Buddhist monastery and spent their time making friends, or checking out books and acquiring antiques at Liulichang.⁴ They might also tutor private students at the homes of court officials. With an excellent reputation, they were talent being cultivated by the government.

On the part of the government, it was preparing these scholars in knowledge and in prestige as talent for future. In this way the government would always have talent for official positions. The Han Dynasty trained talent from ordinary staff in government agencies; the Tang Dynasty fostered them through families of prestigious status; the Song Dynasty cultivated them from such posts as library clerks. The Ming and Qing dynasties integrated the training of talent into the official recruitment system. Even though not every Hanlin scholar eventually became good official material, it is undeniable that statesmen and men of great learning all graduated from the Hanlin Academy.

⁴A marketplace in Beijing featuring books, art works, and antiques.

4.2.2 *The Eight-Part Essay*

Now we come to the eight-part essay, the worst element in the official recruitment examinations in the Ming Dynasty. For some 400 years, from the late Ming to the end of the Qing, the examination based on the writing of the eight-part essay was the most inimical to the selection of talent. Everybody knew it to be meaningless, so why did the government insist on keeping it as a test? Naturally, some might say it was a policy used by the autocratic Emperor to fool the people. The Ming Dynasty was already on the decline when the eight-part essay was initiated. How could the emperors of the times give themselves the trouble of concocting such a vicious system? We should be aware that no system could be created and established by just one or two persons.

In the context of too many applicants, the standard of enrollment became an issue. In the recruitment examination of the Tang Dynasty, the composition of metrical poetry was essential. That was because it was difficult to evaluate the quality of pre-Tang poems, which did not have a standard format. Metrical poems have standards for the number of characters per line, and for tonal and antithesis patterns. One word failing to meet any of the standards meant examination failure. The criteria were specific and objective. In the Song Dynasty, the examination focused on expounding Confucian classics, on such concepts as benevolence, righteousness, and morals. Since every candidate could talk eloquently on such topics, it was difficult to differentiate them. Therefore, the examination evolved to require a certain format when expounding the Confucius classics in the Ming Dynasty. Applicants must strictly follow the format, or they would fail the examination. It was simply an objective standard in examination. We can describe the eight-part essay as no more than another form of metrical poem, with content on the Confucian classics.

The pattern was not fixed at one go, but gradually evolved over time into the final format. It was not initiated by the government in order to fool the people or to suppress talent. Its intention was to test and discover real talent, but only ended in frustrating it. People today criticize the system as ill-meant, without knowing it was not created by any one person at any one time. Moreover, even systems created by fair-minded and kind-hearted people may have weaknesses and problems. Only when we think in this way can we study political systems at a deeper level and learn lessons from them.

4.3 Taxation System of the Ming Dynasty

There are many trivial details and not much innovation of interest in the economic system of the Ming. We shall not go into the details. From the Ming to the Qing Dynasty, the government had two important records concerning land tax and labor tax, the Yellow Record and the Fish-scale Record, one for household ownership of farmland and the other for farmland in its own right. In the last 100 years or so of

the Qing, the Yellow Record fell out of use and census was taken only sporadically. The Fish-scale Record, on the other hand, has remained in use up to the present. It was a Ming Dynasty creation, handed down with improvements in later years. This is worth mentioning.

The Yellow Record kept household ownership of farmland, revised every 10 years. There were four copies, one held at the Household Department, the other three at the governments of the administrative region, the prefecture, and the county respectively. There were four columns/items of record: original size of land, newly acquired land, sold land, actual size. For example, if a household owned 100 *mu* of land and sold 20 *mu*, the original size was 100 *mu*, the sold area was 20, the actual land owned by the family was 80 *mu*; the newly acquired land under the name of the buyer was 20 *mu*. This was the manner of recording transactions within the same area. If the buyer was from another area, the purchase would be recorded as a sub-entry under his name, with all the details clearly noted.

The recording of land by household seems rather troublesome at first glance. Actually, it was also meant to curb farmland transactions. With the passage of time, problems occurred and the recording became distorted. For example, a rich family might own thousands of *mu* of land, much of it in other areas. The owner might then distort the record by putting newly acquired land in the original land column. Such malpractices encouraged the undesirable trend of land purchase. Another problem with the Yellow Record was the grouping of households into *li* and *jia*. Each *li* included 110 households. The top 10, in terms of grain tax based on the number of family members, were counted as head families, and each ten of the remaining 100 formed ten *jia*. The head family of each *li* and the head family of each *jia* were responsible for assisting the government in collecting tax. Given the prevalence of land acquisition, the head family of one *li* might own 1000 *mu* of land, while another might have only 30. In this way, the smaller families were doomed to go broke.

As we discuss the Yellow Record system of the Ming Dynasty, we might well think on the household and farmhand registration system of the Tang Dynasty. Their initiators all had careful and sincere intentions. As time went on, however, problems occurred one after another. In the early stage, some people would distort the system to suit their malpractices. Eventually, the system would become so corrupt that it had to be abandoned for a new one.

Let's now talk about the Fish-scale Record. The practice began in the Song Dynasty, but the diagrammatic recording of farmland was established as a system in the Ming Dynasty. While the Yellow Record focused on household ownership of land, the Fish-scale Record focused on the land itself. Each county drew up the land within its territory and each township did the same. It was called the Fish-scale Record because the patches of contiguous land, with ridges in between some of them, looked like fish scales. The conditions of each patch of land were clearly noted: whether it was owned by the government or a private family, high or low in altitude, fertile or infertile, hilly or near water. The names of the owners were also noted. Transactions were reviewed and recorded every year. Land owners might move from one place to another, but the land remained immovable. Therefore, people of the time called the land their mother and themselves her children. The loving analogy reflected reality.

If we think carefully about the Yellow Record and the Fish-scale Record, it is clear that we should not criticize the intentions of those who established the system. The two records facilitated the collection of taxes by the government, while inhibiting the transaction of land by the people. From the broad perspective of historical trend since the Two-season Taxation System of the Tang Dynasty, the government always prioritized tax collection convenience for its own financial benefit. None made any effort to establish a land system with the backing of economic theory and for the benefit of society and the people. One reason for this was the deterioration of local administration after the Western and Eastern Han dynasties. So the government was unable to pay attention to such a major policy. Another reason was the disappearance of large families of prestigious status since the mid-Tang Dynasty, which meant that the government had to deal directly with small farming families. The process was rather troublesome and so the government must find a solution.

Also, whenever the government adopted a law, people resorted to all sorts of stratagems to get around it. As regards the Fish-scale Record, such tricks included rich landlords diverting their tax to other farming families or registering their land in the names of others. There's not enough time to go into detail on all the tricks. Consequently, although the record of the actual land might be accurate, the names of owners could be messed up, rendering the record as a whole mess. Actually, long before the Jiajing reign (1522–1566), the Fish-scale Record had become as good as abandoned.

Next let's talk about One-Whip Taxation. This lumped all sorts of taxes, including labor tax, under land tax. The government would then levy a single tax in silver according to the size of farmland. The purpose was to simplify tax collection. The practice was first tried out in the areas along the lower reaches of the Yangtze River during the Xuande reign (1426–1435) of Emperor Xuanzong and gradually extended throughout the country. The law had its heyday during the Jiajing reign of Emperor Shizong and the Longqing reign (1567–1572) of Emperor Muzong. Like the practice of collecting tax in lieu of labor in the Song Dynasty, One-Whip Taxation was accepted as convenient in the south. In the north, however, it was opposed fiercely for causing inconvenience. Actually, the system was not implemented for long before it became messy.

In our discussion of the Yellow Record, the Fish-scale Record, and the One-Whip Taxation, there is an important point of which we need to be reminded. As I often say, no law or regulation could be set up and implemented as a stand-alone. It had to be coordinated with several other regulations, and they would inevitably influence each other. Based on this understanding, through mutual coordination and influence, all the regulations of a certain period inevitably formed a complete system. Most notable was the interaction between the regulation on land and that on tax.

The Nine-Square Land System in the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BC) was regarded by later generations as an ideal, exemplary land system. But even such an example was eventually destroyed by the aristocratic class of the time in their pursuit of tax collection convenience. The Equal-Land System of the Northern Wei Dynasty (AD 386–534) had to be preceded by the sorting out of household registration under the system of three tiers of local leadership. The Tri-tax System

of the Tang Dynasty became invalid when the household registration system fell apart. Since the Two-season Taxation System of the Tang Dynasty, various practical difficulties forced the government to focus on the tax system only and to stop chasing an ideal land system. After the Tang Two-season Taxation System, the tax system itself also encountered many difficulties.

The Yellow Record and Fish-scale Record got messed up over the years, just like the household and farmhand registration system of the Tang. Such a situation was related to and influenced by the organization and functioning of local government entities such as the prefectures and the counties. Moreover, local administration, its degree of autonomy, and social conditions differed between periods. For example, there were feudal aristocrats in the Spring and Autumn Period, and there were large families of prestigious social status from the Eastern Han to the mid-Tang Dynasty. With the diminishing and eventual disappearance of such families in late Tang and the Song and Ming dynasties, the government was faced with a new situation, one in which they had to deal with individual farming families. These factors are very relevant for an understanding and discussion of the evolution of land tax systems in Chinese history. Therefore, we can imagine that if we propose a new land policy or plan today, we should consider coordination of other policies and how to suit the general realities of society. When we talk about the merits and demerits of political systems in history, we need to understand the complex conditions for the establishment and promotion of any new system, and to appreciate the comprehensive thinking behind them.

4.4 The Military System of the Ming Dynasty

The military power of the Ming Dynasty was not much inferior to that of Tang. The military system established by Emperor Taizu after he founded the dynasty was similar to that of the Tang, only with a different nomenclature. Soldiers were based in garrisons of different sizes, as in the Tang Dynasty. Emperor Taizu once said, "I keep a million troops without costing the people a single grain." How did he do it? By the garrison system. A small garrison covered one prefecture, with 1120 soldiers, and a large garrison covered two, with about 5600. A small garrison was further divided into units of 112 soldiers each. Military affairs were coordinated by the Five-Army Command at central government level and by Provincial Military Commands at the local level. When there was need for military action, the government would dispatch a Commander-in-Chief to lead the garrison soldiers. When the action ended, the Commander-in-Chief would return to his original position and the troops to their respective garrisons. As in the Tang Dynasty, the garrisons were allocated land for farming and were exempt from any tax.

When reading in history books about the late years of the Ming Dynasty, we get the impression the country was rather weak. The Manchus were merely a small tribe in the area to the east and south of the Songhua River, so how come the Ming empire could not resist it? Angry about this, we cannot help criticizing the Ming government.

Actually, we should see that the collapse of a big country like China was not a simple matter. We should understand it from the perspective of historical reality. Empty and irrelevant remarks like cultural deterioration, moral decline, autocratic and dark rule of the government make no sense at all. In terms of politics, it is inevitable for any system in place for two or three centuries to become problematic. After enjoying some 300 years of peace, it was natural for the Ming system to become corrupt, no matter how good it had been at the start. Over such a long period, it was not possible to remain alert all the time. A certain complacency was natural.

The garrison system, for example, was not a bad one, and it enabled the Ming Dynasty to achieve outstanding military feats. Later on, as the country prospered and enjoyed peace along all its borders, its soldiers never had to fight another battle in their lifetime. They would naturally relax. When the government did mobilize its troops, say to attack the Manchus, it had to call them from different parts of the country, as was the rule and as was reasonable. For example 500 would come from Yunnan Province, another 1000 from Sichuan Province, and so on. Because of the long distances between the garrisons and Beijing (the capital), the movement of troops in the hundreds of thousands would produce a huge stir all over the country. And then, the soldiers spoke different dialects, had different customs and habits, looked different, and were strangers to one another.

When the arsenals were opened up, the weapons had turned rusty and the uniforms had come apart at the seams after long years of storage. The government should not be blamed for that. Was it supposed to prepare hundreds of thousands of uniforms every two or three years and then leave them to go moldy one batch after another? Even today's United States would make a lot of military aircraft only in the presence of a perceived need. Without an arch enemy in the shape of the Soviet Union it would not produce them. In the Ming Dynasty, the military uniforms turned moldy and ragged because the country enjoyed protracted peace. Now, when the tattered uniforms were hurriedly distributed to the soldiers, the camps were thrown into disarray, as they tried to swap them, the fat ones for larger sizes and the thin ones for smaller. In the end, most had to make do with what they had. Before departure for the front, it was customary for troops to offer sacrifices to the military banner. The ceremony was not necessarily a superstitious action, but similar to today's troops testing their guns and cannons. Back then, the army would slaughter an ox in a ceremony to honor the banner. It was said that the Ming troops were unable to kill the ox. Why? Because the knife had been in storage for too long and was now rusty and blunt. If the knife for slaughtering the sacrificial ox was in this state, we can imagine the condition of weapons carried by the hundreds of thousands of soldiers. We should not cite such examples to accuse Han culture as inferior and the Han people as becoming weak. It was all because the country had enjoyed peace for so long and had forgotten the realities of life in wartime.

Let's take a look at the Manchus. Their headgear was designed to cover the entire face, leaving only openings for the eyes and mouth. It also covered the ears to keep them warm in the bitterly cold northeast weather. The mandarin jacket and robe we wear today originated from the military uniforms of the Manchu people and were designed for convenience of horse riding. The robe had an opening on one

side, allowing the rider to roll back the lining of the front to cover both knees. By contrast, the uniforms of the Ming soldiers exposed their knees to the cold. The Manchu uniforms had horse-hoof cuffs designed to protect the fingers so that the rider could hold the reins without getting frostbite. The Ming troops, especially those from Yunnan and Guangdong provinces, had never seen ice or snow before. Called to Beijing post in haste, they put on the ill-fitting old uniforms, and were then dispatched to the northeast beyond the Shanhai Pass. Their spirit broke when first faced with the fierce cold wind there. How were they to combat the Manchu troops in the field? The situation was unanticipated; they were totally unprepared for such an encounter. Du Song (?–1619), a Commander-in-Chief, was shot dead by a Manchu arrow. He was killed because the metal of his helmet was rusty, allowing the arrowhead to penetrate. If even the Commander-in-Chief didn't have strong armor, what chance did the ordinary soldiers have? Such details are not to be found from a casual reading of history.

Xu Guangqi (1562–1633, scientist and high official), who was based in the south, submitted several proposals to the throne. He suggested recruiting new soldiers and training them from the basics. The troops might not be huge in number, but every soldier should have a uniform that fitted and be prepared for the weather in the northeast. They also should have new weapons made to suit their individual physical strength. Training came next. Xu proposed specific plans, and the government agreed them. But then, the Household Department had no money, so the plans could not be implemented. From this we can see how important a country's material conditions are to its military might. We cannot expect to overcome a strong enemy on willpower alone. After its initial great defeat, the Ming government learned its lesson and quickly changed its strategy. It should then have been able to resist the Manchu invasion. But then, the central government collapsed and the troops were no longer able to keep on fighting for it. Back in the Song Dynasty, there was the debate on whether the government should keep a good horse or to sustain 25 farmers. It was like today's debate on which is better to have, butter or artillery?

Military uniforms were locked up inside the arsenals. Nationwide, farmers lived in peace and quiet. They lived a lifetime without experiencing war. Such a society deserves better of us than harsh condemnation. When war broke out in the border area (the northeast), the soldiers were required in great haste to fight there. Military uniforms were the lifeblood of the troops. We have to admit the importance of material conditions. Without matching material conditions, morale could not last for long. Our military strength had also deteriorated during centuries of peace. It is no surprise that the Ming Dynasty was unable to resist the sudden rise of the Qing Dynasty. We should take a historical perspective and understand history as it was. By this I mean explaining history according to history. We should not make such empty remarks as the Han people had become weak and its culture was no good. Instead, we should analyze the specific situations of the time. In other words, we should use historical materials to analyze the reasons for the defeat. Of course, what I have talked about is just a small part of history, but it is a realistic part.

Glossary

administrative region	承宣布政使司 Chengxuanbuzheng-shisi
afternoon court session	晚朝 Wanchao
approved in red	批红/朱批 Pihong/Zhupi
<i>Book of the Yellow Emperor—On the Governance of China</i>	《黄书》Huangshu
Branch Secretariat	行中书省 Xingzhongshusheng
Cabinet	内阁 Neige
Cabinet Grand Scholar	内阁大学士 Neigedaxueshi
Cabinet Scholar	内阁学士 Neigexueshi
Central Supervisor	都御史 Duyushi
<i>Collection of Book Reviews</i>	《日知录》Rizhilu
Commander-in-Chief	总兵官 Zongbingguan
county	县 Xian
County Magistrate	知县 Zhixian
county scholar	秀才 Xiucai
courier stations	驿骑/驿路/亭 Yiqi/Yilu/Ting
Court Discussion	廷议 Tingyi
Court Investigation	廷鞫 Tingju
Court of Judicial Review	大理院 Daliyuan
Court Recommendation	廷推 Tingtui
<i>Critique on Past Dynasties</i>	《明夷待访录》Mingyidaifanglu
decrees drafted on a slip of paper	条旨/票拟 Tiaozhi/Piaoni
Department of Archives	通政司 Tongzhengsi
Department of Supervision	都察院 Duchayuan
Deputy Regional Administrative Commissioner	(布政使) 参政 Canzheng
Deputy Regional Judiciary Commissioner	(提刑按察使) 副使 Fushi
Equal-land System	均田制 Juntianzhi
Executive Minister	尚书令 Shangshuling
Executive Ministry	尚书省 Shangshusheng
Fish-scale Record	鱼鳞册 Yulince
Five-Army Command	五军都督府 Wujundudufu
General Governor	总督 Zongdu
hall	朝房 Chaofang

Hanlin Academy	翰林院 Hanlinyuan
Hanlin scholar	翰林 Hanlin
head families	长 Zhang
household and farmhand registration system	账籍制度 Zhangjizhidu
Household Department	户部 Hubu
Household sections	户部司 Hubusi
Imperial Gate	御门 Yumen
Imperial Hall/Inner Court	御殿/内朝 Yudian/Neichao
<i>Jinshi</i> scholar	进士 Jinshi
Left Deputy Executive Minister	尚书左仆射 Shangshuzuopuye
Local Inspector	监司官 Jiansiguan
Local Inspectors	道台 Daotai
Military Region	大都督府 Dadudufu
Military Supervisor	节度使 Jiedushi
military zone	卫 Wei
Ministry of Review	门下省 Menxiasheng
Ministry of Supervision	御史台 Yushitai
national examination	会试 Huishi
Nine High Officials	九卿 Jiuqing
Nine-square Land System	井田制 Jingtianzhi
official decrees	谕旨 Yuzhi
One-Whip Taxation	一条鞭法 Yitiaobianfa
palace examination	殿试 Dianshi
prefecture	府 Fu
Prefecture Envoy	刺史 Cishi
Prefecture Governor	牧 Mu
Prime Secretariat	都省 Dusheng
Prime Secretariat	宰相府 Zaixiangfu
private advisor to an official	师爷 Shiye
Province	省 Sheng
Provincial Education Commissioner	学政主考 Xuezhengzhukao
provincial examination	乡试 Xiangshi
Provincial Examination Commissioner	主考官 Zhukaoguan
Provincial Military Command	都司 (“都指挥司”简称) Dusi
provincial scholar	举人 Juren

qualified <i>jinshi</i> scholar	进士及第
Rank	品 Pin
Region	路 Lu
Regional Administrative Commissioner	布政使 (“承宣布政使”简称) Buzhengshi
Regional Commander-in-Chief	大都督 Dadudu
Regional Judiciary Commissioner	按察使 (“提刑按察使”简称) Anchashi
Regional Military Commissioner	都指挥使 Duzhihuishi
Regional Supervisor	巡抚 Xunfu
Reviewer	给事中 Jishizhong
Reviewer's Disagreement	科参 Kekan
Reviewers of the Six Departments	六科给事中 Liubujishizhong
Right Deputy Executive Minister	尚书右仆射 Shangshuyoupuye
Rituals Supervisor	司礼监 Silijian
Secretariat	中书省 Zhongshusheng
Secretaries	中书舍人 Zhongshusheren
Seven High Officials	七卿 Qiqing
Six-department Executive Ministry	六部尚书 Liubushangshu
special prefecture	州 Zhou
status distinction	流品 Liupin
Sub-department	分司 Fensi
Sub-regional Administrative Commissioners	分守道 Fenshoudao
Sub-regional Judiciary Commissioners	分巡道 Fenxundao
Supervisor	御史 Yushi
Supervisor	观察使 Guanchashi
teachers of the Emperor or the princes	经筵讲官 Jingyanjiangguan
the administrative system of provinces	行省制度 Xingshengzhidu
the Eight-part Essay	八股文 Baguwen
the garrison system	卫所制度 Weisuo zhidu
the heads of the Six Departments of the Executive Ministry	尚书 Shangshu
the morning court session	早朝 Zaochao
the noon court session	午朝 Wuchao
the system of three tiers of local leadership	三长制 Sanzhangzhi
Three Law Departments	三法司 Sanfasi

Three Regional Administrative Departments	三司 Sansi
Tri-tax System	租庸调制 Zuyongdiaozi
Two-season Taxation System	两税制 Liangshuizhi
Vice Minister	侍郎 Shilang
Yellow Record	黄册 Huangce

Chapter 5

The Qing Dynasty



5.1 Political System as Opposed to Political Means

When we talk about political systems, some are truly systems, but others can be called no more than events or means. A political system is part of politics, whereas means are not part of politics, but events or methods. In general, a political system is often established out of public good, with certain limits. A political means often comes from private considerations, without proper limits. There is no clear distinguishing line between political methods and political techniques. Moreover, the establishment of a political system usually has many complex relationships and some more or less self-interested intentions behind it. It is not possible for a political system to be established absolutely out of public good. No such a system can be found in the past, and there is little hope for such a system any time soon in the future. There should be a proportion of public and private good; so which was more prevalent in the political systems of ancient China? Which was more significant, means or systems?

While the Western Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 25) emphasized systems, the Eastern Han (AD 25–220) was run mostly out of Emperor Guangwu's (r. AD 25–57) private intentions. The Tang Dynasty (AD 618–907) had indeed a political system, whereas the Song (960–1279) was mostly run through techniques. Much of the politics in the Ming Dynasty (1368–1644) can only be described as events, not systems. The Qing Dynasty (1616–1911), in particular, had no system of its own. All its systems were based on those of the Ming, plus many private intentions. Such private self-interest may be explained as "political power of the tribe." Everything was based on the self-interest of the Manchu tribe. Its dynasty only had political means, and no political systems.

5.2 Political Power of the Tribe

When discussing politics, the first things Westerners will always bring up is sovereignty. Much of their political thinking is based on the concept of sovereignty. In the West there was a division between divine power, monarchical power, and civil power. And state power now rests with the people. In discussions of politics in China, we never talk about sovereignty. For example, we wouldn't ask about sovereignty in the political power of the Ming (or any dynasty). The idea of sovereignty is rare in China. As far as politics is concerned, the Chinese emphasize obligations. We simply ask, what is it the government should do? What are its obligations? Is it doing its job? We are not concerned about sovereignty in politics, which implies free will. Take this teacup for example. If its sovereignty belongs to me, that means I have the freedom to use it. This has to do with rights and benefits, not with morals or justice. Implementing obligations involves morals and justice; sovereignty has to do with freedom. This is the huge difference between Chinese and Western political thinking.

Let's now take a brief look at political sovereignty in Chinese history from the Western perspective. In the reality of history, it was impossible for political sovereignty over such a large country as China to be held in the hands of one person. It would have been too difficult for one person to exercise such sovereignty because the country was too big. Therefore, political power was always held by a group. The same as in the West! Divine power had the support of religious groups. Monarchical power usually had the support of aristocrats. The Tsar of Russia had the support of many aristocratic families. Before the French Revolution, the King of France also had the support of many aristocrats. So, monarchical power was part shared either with the aristocracy or the military. We might call it political power of the aristocracy and political power of the military. Nor was it an easy matter to differentiate the two, since most aristocrats were in the military and, once in power, the military became aristocracy. These days the Communist Party criticizes Western democracy as the political power of the capitalist class, which is supported by many large industrialists and capitalists, and claims itself as the representative of proletarian dictatorship. Be it divine power or monarchical power, the capitalist class or the proletarian class, it is without exception held in the collective hands of a group.

In China, there was no such a thing as imperial power since the Han Dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), because no Emperor alone could have held power over the country. There was no power of aristocracy, either, since there was no distinct aristocratic class from the Han Dynasty on. Was the military in power? We cannot see any government run by the military from the Han Dynasty downward. Was there a capitalist class in power? There has never been a capitalist class in China. As far as political power is concerned, it rested in the hands of scholars. They held the power of government, from the Han Dynasty down to the Ming. Under the imperial examination system to select officials, scholars must follow relevant regulations to enter government. There was absolutely no hereditary privilege. Therefore, scholars in Chinese society were people with status distinction. They did not form a class. How did the Chinese

political system evolve in such a way that it vested power in a bunch of scholars, avoiding dictatorship by the aristocracy, the military, the rich, or the poor? Because the ideal in Chinese politics was to lay emphasis on obligations, rather than on sovereignty. This is a topic in the category of political thinking. I bring it up here because political system and political thinking are actually two sides of the same coin.

Within this political tradition in Chinese history, there was variation in the power of scholars. Besides political power held by scholars, another special power existed. I call it tribal power, power held by a tribe, an ethnic group other than Han Chinese. For example, when the Mongol and Manchu tribes ruled China, it was not the person of the Yuan Emperor or the Qing Emperor respectively who held all political power. In these two dynasties, the Emperor had the support of the entire Mongol and Manchu tribes respectively. The Mongol and Manchu people formed the privileged class or privileged elements. We call this kind of political power “tribal power.” They controlled the government and held political power in the hands of their respective tribe. Such power was surely based on self-interest. Consequently, all methods under their political power cannot be counted as political systems. They can only be counted as political devices for the purpose of controlling power.

But there is no basis for arguing that scholars also harbored private intentions to control the entire country. This is because, unlike the Manchu people and Mongols, scholars did not form a distinct bloc in society. In other words, it was the political system that encouraged and promoted scholars: there wasn’t a certain group of scholars in society who grabbed and held power. In the last years of the Eastern Han Dynasty, scholars did form socially prestigious families, and from then on through the Wei (AD 220–265), Jin (AD 265–420), and Southern and Northern dynasties (AD 420–589), state power was indeed held by such families. But even in those dynasties, the political system did not grant these families the privilege to hold power; it intended for political power to be held by scholars. The privileged families held power because, under the prevailing social conditions, they were the source from which scholars came. The situation represented a social trend, a long-standing political custom, which the system did not make a point of correcting. It was no more than that. Up to the Tang Dynasty, open examinations (to recruit officials) reopened the gates of political power to scholars. The Tang system ended the era of power based on family status and revived the old tradition of power based on scholarship.

Today, we advocate that state power should be held by the entire population. We may say it is our dream. Actually, it is not possible for all the people to exercise political power collectively. It is inevitable that certain groups, either capitalists, intellectuals, or whatever group, will represent the entire people. For example, the Communist Party advocates dictatorship by the proletariat class. It is only in theory that state power can be held by the entire population. The democratic countries in the West say they represent the entire population. Did the scholars in Chinese history not represent the entire population too? They studied the teachings of ancient sages. They took the path of improving one’s character, running one’s family affairs well, going on to handle one’s state well, and then venturing to bring peace to all under heaven. In addition, scholars had to pass the selection examination to be placed in

official positions based on their individual talent. According to the Chinese way of thinking, the opinions of these scholars, therefore, represented those of the entire nation. China's open examination was a different approach to that of the West's public elections. But, in that both sought to select people to organize and run the government on behalf of the entire population, were not their ideals the same? Following this line of thought, political power was opened to the public very early in Chinese history. Therefore, the sovereignty of government was never a topic for discussion among the Chinese. Government in the West was opened to the public later. That's why they often disagreed on the matter of where governmental sovereignty should belong, to the monarch or the public. This was the origin of emphasis on political sovereignty in Western political thinking.

As I talked in my earlier lectures, the Emperor did not hold the sovereignty of government in Chinese traditional politics from early on. He did not hold political power totally by himself. It was only in the Ming Dynasty that the position of Prime Minister was abolished and the Emperor became particularly weighty in the government. Even then, the political system did not vest governmental sovereignty in the Emperor. The Emperor was not entitled to claim the country belonged to him. No Chinese Emperor, not even those of the Ming and Qing dynasties, ever claimed that "I am the country." Even in cases where the Emperor took over the power of the Prime Minister, it was a change to the system, not an innovation in theory. It was only under tribal power in the Yuan (1206–1368) and Ming dynasties that scholars were replaced by Mongol and Manchu people to run the government. On the surface, however, the Qing Dynasty still allowed scholars to hold political power and the government was very much like one run by scholars. This was rooted in Chinese traditional political theory, which the Manchu rulers understood or didn't formally oppose. Only they manipulated it by placing the Manchu tribe above Han scholars. Therefore, the Qing Dynasty was under the autocratic rule of a tribe, not of an Emperor. This needs to be understood before going on to discuss the Qing system.

5.3 The Qing Government Under Tribal Power

5.3.1 The Central Government

As discussed above, the politics of the Qing Dynasty were different from Chinese traditional politics, because of the background presence of a particular group of people devoted to the Emperor. They were the Manchu tribe, to which the Emperor belonged. As head of state, the Emperor should have the support of all the people of the country. There should not be a special group giving special support to the government. Such a government was self-interested, and so its foundation was not solid. The Qing government always showed partiality towards the Manchu people and depended on their support to stand firm. This was how a government of self-interest was run. Such a government needed to apply political tactics, as opposed to

political systems. The Ming Dynasty abolished the position of Prime Minister and the Qing Dynasty followed suit. The Qing Dynasty also relied on the Cabinet Grand Scholars to run the government. Such arrangement was convenient for the Manchu rulers, because, without a Prime Minister, it was easier for the Emperor to exercise autocratic rule. And the Qing Emperor, obviously, was a member of the Manchu ethnic group.

5.3.1.1 The Military Council

Emperor Yongzheng (r. 1722–1735) set up the Military Council, in addition to the Cabinet. The Wenhua Hall and the Wuying Hall in the Imperial Palace were the offices of the Cabinet Scholars. The Military Council was seated in the South Studio, a small room behind the three main halls in the Imperial Palace. At the beginning, the Emperor issued military decrees through the Military Council rather than the Cabinet, so that military secrecy could be maintained. Later on, he made this routine so that many important government decrees passed through the Military Council instead of the Cabinet. As its name indicates, the Military Council obviously exercised military rule while the Cabinet exercised civil rule. Now that the top-level decrees were coming via the Military Council, the government should, of course, be said to be exercising military rule. On the other hand, the Military Councilors were actually selected from the Cabinet to assist the Emperor in the South Studio. The result was that the Emperor need not go to the Wenhua and Wuying halls to handle state affairs. He did the job in the privacy of the Military Council. It was similar to the situation in the Ming Dynasty, where the Emperor stayed in the Inner Palace and consulted only a few individuals. However, the Qing Emperors were much smarter than their Ming counterparts. To avoid repeating the problem of eunuchs usurping state power, which had led to the demise of the dynasty, the Qing Emperors chose court officials as their private councilors. In terms of system, the practices were the same. Be they eunuchs or Military Councilors, they functioned as the Emperor's personal secretaries rather than court officials.

In the previous lecture, we mentioned that Zhang Juzheng (1525–1582, a Grand Cabinet Scholar of Ming) was not entitled to issue top-level government decrees directly, nor was he entitled to require duplicates of government reports to the Emperor. The principal (the Emperor) and the secretary (Zhang Juzheng) were counted as a single entity, so it was not fitting for Zhang to require duplicates of reports to the Emperor. Had Zhang been a legally established Prime Minister, government reports should have been submitted to him, not to the Emperor. Since Zhang was not officially the Prime Minister, what he did was not in line with established political tradition. In the Qing Dynasty, the decrees that the Military Council issued to the Six Executive Departments and the General Governors and Regional Supervisors actually did come from the Emperor. This is because the Emperor was entitled to issue top-level government decrees, whereas the Military Council only acted as his secretariat, his South Studio.

The procedures for issuing top-level decrees of the Qing government were extremely unreasonable. There were two types of such decree, Open Dispatch Decrees and Sealed Envelope Decrees. The former were mostly on less important issues, such as the Emperor's inspection tour, ancestral tombs visit, imperial lecture (provided by scholar-officials to the Emperor), disaster relief; promotion or demotion of directors and deputy directors of the Six Executive Departments at the central government, and of local Military Commanders and Prefecture Governors; also announcements for the central and local governments. Decrees in this category were drafted by the Cabinet, reviewed by the Emperor, and then passed to the Six Executive Departments by the Cabinet. The procedure was in line with the tradition of the previous dynasty. Sealed Envelope Decrees were unique to the Qing Dynasty. They were directly dispatched to the recipients by the Military Council. For example, a decree to the Regional Supervisor of Jiangsu Province or the Personnel Department Director would be delivered directly to the Supervisor or the Director in person. No one else knew its content. At first, only decrees concerning military secrets were sent in this manner, but, later on, they were also used for matters of special importance. Such decrees were drafted by the Military Council. The Emperor would review it, seal it in an envelope, and stamp the envelope. The stamp carried the words: Office for Military Affairs. Who did that job? No person other than the Emperor, of course. Once the envelope was stamped, no one else was allowed to read the content. For example, if the decree was about economic or financial issues intended for the Regional Supervisor of Jiangsu Province, even officials of the Household Department were not allowed to read it. Likewise, the Military Department Director was not eligible to read a decree on military affairs intended for the General Governor of Guangdong and Guangxi provinces. The Military Councilors were not court officials in legal terms, because they only worked for the Emperor and were not officially appointed as the highest-level government executives. Sealed Envelope Decrees, carrying the stamp of the Military Council, were passed to the Military Department Director. He was not supposed to open the envelope: his sole role was to put it inside another envelope and dispatch the package to the recipient. In this way, all state affairs and all the officials across the country related directly to the Emperor, with all other parties in ignorance. National politics was run in secrecy, which can only be called a technique, not a political system!

Some Sealed Envelope Decrees bearing Emperor Yongzheng's instructions in red ink have been preserved to this day through various copyings. Those were terribly important imperial decrees in Qing politics. Yongzheng was a notorious autocrat. Compared with his predecessor Kangxi (r. 1661–1722), who can be counted a good Emperor, Yongzheng was too autocratic. From the decrees bearing Yongzheng's instructions in red, we can see how he ruled. Via his secret agents sent out to probably every part of the country, Yongzheng kept himself informed of the activities of local officials. Even their private lives, including their relationships with immediate family and relatives, were no exception. Smart, autocratic, and energetic, Yongzheng wrote detailed instructions on all the reports and kept himself informed on all matters of central and local governments alike, important and trivial alike. He was always the first in the know.

In the past, reports to the throne had to go via the Six Executive Departments; similarly, documents from the Emperor had to be reviewed by these departments. This was because politics had to be open and the Department Directors were the top executives of the country. The case was still true with the Ming Dynasty. High-ranking officials had to be recommended by court officials and low-ranking ones were appointed by the Personnel Department. Educational matters must be dealt with by the Rituals Department. The Ming Emperor could not make decisions in private without involving the executives of the government. The way the Qing Emperor ran politics was not a system, nor was it customary. It can only be called political technique. Why? Because the Qing politics was entirely based on self-interest, from which no political system could emerge.

On this point, the Qing Dynasty was more autocratic than the Ming. In the Ming, while the position of Prime Minister was abolished, the role was played by the Emperor within the system. Of course, a real Prime Minister would have taken responsibility if he did something wrong, while the Emperor did not have to. With this exception, the Ming system was not much different from previous dynasties. The Qing Dynasty went beyond this limit. We have mentioned earlier that in the Tang and Song dynasties, imperial decrees must bear the stamp of the Prime Minister. Otherwise, they were illegal. Why should the Emperor's decrees bear the Prime Minister's stamp? Because that was the system. How could the Qing Emperor pass down his decrees without the knowledge of government officials? Because he was using political technique. It is easy to tell the difference: one was for the public good and reasonable; the other was for selfish purposes and unreasonable.

How could such selfish politics keep on going? Because the Emperor had the entire Manchu tribe at his back. For an Emperor to practice autocracy there must be a part of the population giving him strong support. Every autocrat had a special group of people behind him. When we talk about the autocracy of an Emperor, we should know the forces assisting and supporting him. No Emperor since the Qin Dynasty (221–206 BC) had a fixed force like the Qing did in the Manchu group. Neither was there any special group, such as the aristocracy, the army, or a capitalist class. If the Emperor employed scholars and had their support, it was a fair relationship, because scholars were not the Emperor's private force. Moreover, scholars were not a fixed group of people.

In Chinese history the Qing Emperor had the Manchu group while the Yuan Emperor had the Mongol group behind him. The other dynasties, in general, all employed scholars from across China. They were selected from the entire population, from those who had received education and passed relevant examinations. We cannot but describe such practice as fair. Some people regard it as representing "feudal society." Their view is sheer nonsense! Scholars did not represent feudalism. In other words, it was not selfish of the Emperor or the government to train and employ scholars. It was certainly true of the Yuan Dynasty favoring the Mongols and the Qing favoring the Manchu. Their politics were selfish. Because of their selfish nature, their systems were but political technique.

5.3.1.2 The Six Departments and Department Directors of Qing

At the central-government level, the Qing Dynasty followed the Ming practice in the structure of Six Departments. In the Ming, the Department Directors had considerable power. The Military Department Director and the Personnel Department Director, in particular, had the power to direct the army and appoint officials. The Emperor's decrees must pass through the relevant departments before reaching lower levels of government; reports on state affairs also had to pass through the relevant departments to reach the Emperor. The Military Department was entitled to give orders to the General Governors and Regional Supervisors.

The Six Departments of the Qing Dynasty had much more limited power. The Department Directors were not entitled to give orders directly to the lower levels of government, so they were not administrative executives. A bigger difference was that the Directors and their deputies were all entitled to report to the Emperor separately. In the case of the Military Department Director, he should be in charge of all military affairs of the country, making military plans, and commanding the army. His deputies should only assist him. Now in the Qing Dynasty, the Department Director was expected to report to the Emperor directly, but so were the Deputy Department Directors. As a result, the Director had no authority over his deputies.

In the past, each of the Six Departments had only one Director, who had just one Deputy. Now in the Qing Dynasty, each Department had a Manchu Director and a Han Director, two Manchu Deputies and two Han Deputies. The result was six directors for each of the Six Departments, a total of 36. Within each Department, the Han Director did not know what the Manchu Director had reported to the Emperor, and none of the Deputies knew who was setting a barrier against whom. Nor did they know the Emperor's instructions to any of the others. How could the Six Departments perform their duties under such an arrangement? Since the Six Departments could not perform their duties, all state affairs fell into the hands of the Emperor.

Back in the Ming, each of the Departments had Reviewers, who were entitled to speak against the Emperor's views despite their low official rank. On the surface, of course, they were speaking against the Department Directors and their Deputies. In reality, all the Emperor's decrees had to pass through the relevant Departments, so the Reviewers of the Six Departments were entitled to criticize the Emperor's views. The Tang Dynasty had a similar situation, where the Prime Minister issued government decrees. When the Reviewers raised opposing comments, they were speaking against the Prime Minister, not the Emperor.

At the end of the Ming Dynasty, when the rebels Zhang Xianzhong (1606–1647) and Li Zicheng (1606–1645) shook the empire and the Manchu troops threatened it from outside the Shanhai Pass, the Emperor proposed to suppress the rebels first and then fight against the Manchu troops, a strategy known as solving internal problems before dealing with external ones. It was not a bad idea. When the proposal was presented to the Military Department, it was endorsed by the Department Director, but all the Reviewers of the Department opposed it. Even the Emperor could do nothing about them and was forced to fire the Department Director. Some people identify this as the point at which the Ming Dynasty was lost.

When everybody had a different opinion at meetings and policies were so difficult to implement, how could the country survive a major crisis?

In modern Western democratic politics, few policies go through without opposition. The President or Prime Minister has to have the support of the majority of his party (to push through a policy). Even with majority support, many things cannot be done. There were no political parties in ancient China. Political affairs were open to all, and everybody had a say. In case of a national crisis, foreign affairs and military affairs sometimes had to be kept secret. Autocracy was necessary in some cases. Some people think modern-day democratic politics in Britain and the United States are too slow to respond to urgent matters, which is sometimes a disadvantage. In general, however, there are more disadvantages than advantages in secret or autocratic politics. Democratic politics and/or open politics, on the other hand, always have more advantages than disadvantages. In technical terms, Chinese traditional politics had more than 2000 years' experience, containing many valuable lessons. One such was the openness of politics. Politics were run under a given political system. Everything had to be dealt with under the system, so it was impossible to keep politics secret.

The Qing Emperor, however, issued decrees without passing through the Six Departments. Directors of the Six Departments were not entitled to issue decrees to the lower levels of government, while the Directors and their deputies submitted reports to the Emperor separately. The Reviewers of the Six Departments were not entitled to refute an imperial decree. Their duty was restricted to criticizing the government and to reminding the Emperor of his errors. In normal political arrangement, a government department should function as an integral whole. The Military Department, for example, should be under the full responsibility of its Director. His Deputy should only assist him. Now that the Department Directors and their deputies reported separately to the Emperor, it meant the Department was not functioning as an integral whole but was divided between individuals. Take the present-day Ministry of Finance for another example. The Finance Minister represents the Ministry. The Deputy Finance Minister should report to the Minister, not to the Director of the Executive Yuan. The logic is simple. This is why the political arrangements of the Qing Dynasty can only be called political technique. They did not constitute a political system.

As I have mentioned, the Directors and their deputies of the Six Departments could report to the Emperor directly. At the same time, other people were prohibited from reporting to the Emperor. For example, the Hanlin Academy was a reputable and respected institute. The Compilers and Junior Editors there were all officials of fine reputation. They had no actual political power, but officials of their kind in the past were entitled to voice their opinions to the government. Now in the Qing Dynasty, they were forbidden from "reporting political affairs to the Emperor." As for the local officials, only the General Governors, Regional Supervisors, Regional Administrative Commissioners, and Provincial Inspecting Commissioners were entitled to speak to the government. The Sub-provincial Administrators and those below (Prefecture Governors and County Magistrates) were all prohibited from reporting

to the Emperor. Compared with the Ming Dynasty, when even the common people could speak directly to the Emperor, that was a huge step backward.

Such rules of the Qing Dynasty, if they can be called a political system at all, prohibited people from taking an interest in politics. What else, except selfish interests, could such a system mean? Moreover, the Qing government also prohibited people from expressing their opinions openly. For example, at the lecture hall of each prefecture school and each county school, there was a stone tablet carrying several official prohibitions. Instead of being planted in an upright position, it was placed on its side and so was called a “reclining tablet.” On it were inscribed the bans: (1) students must not talk about political affairs; (2) must not form an association or society; (3) must not circulate their writings. These were precisely the things prized by modern Westerners: freedom of speech, freedom of organization, and freedom of the press. At this point in modern history, the bans formed a sharp contrast between the West and China, one that should really cause us shame.

The reclining stone tablets were placed in the 5th year of Emperor Shunzhi’s reign (1643–1661). Jin Shengtan (1608–1661), a renowned writer and literary critic, was beheaded for violating the bans. At the time, corruption was rife in the imperial selection examinations, and students would voice their complaints before the Confucius memorial stones in the lecture hall of government schools, thereby violating the bans on political speaking and association. From these we can see the intention behind the Qing system. The Ming government encouraged open expression of opinions. The same was true with all dynasties but the Qing. What sort of system was this but a handful of unreasonable political techniques facilitating the convenience of rule over the country by the Manchu tribe?

In the dynasties prior to the Qing, the Personnel Department was responsible for the appointment of officials. Those below the fifth rank were directly appointed by the Personnel Department, while those at and above were recommended by the department to the Prime Minister for his decision. The Ming Dynasty abolished the position of Prime Minister, so candidates for higher-ranking positions were recommended by incumbent court officials, and appointed at meetings attended by the Nine or the Seven High Officials. They would, nonetheless, respect the opinions of the Personnel Department Director. Officials of lower rank were still appointed by the Personnel Department. In the Qing Dynasty, high-rank officials were appointed by the Emperor through special decrees. The Personnel Department had no knowledge at all, nor was there recommendation by court officials. Only officials of lower ranks were credentialed by the Personnel Department, a legal system passed down from history and not abolished even by the Qing Emperor. Still, the credentialed officials had to be reviewed by the Emperor in person before they could take office. In the end, it was the Emperor who held the power to appoint all officials. The Emperor stooped to interview even petty officials not because he regarded them important, but because he wanted to declare to the Han people and the whole society: This is my authority; you have no way of becoming an official without my consent. It definitely showed that the Qing Dynasty rule resorted to political techniques, not systems. Based on self-interest, the Qing system could only be called technique, and trickery. It had no significance. If their political technique had any significance, it was selfish in nature.

5.3.2 Local Governments of the Qing Dynasty

In the Ming Dynasty, Regional Administrative Commissioners were the highest-ranking local officials. General Governors and Regional Supervisors were temporary positions in times of need only. The Qing Dynasty turned them into regular positions above the Regional Administrative Commissioners. As a result, General Governors and Regional Supervisors became formal local administrators, and Regional Administrative Commissioners became their subordinates. Such an arrangement was military in nature, or for military purposes. Thus, above the four levels of local administration—county, prefecture, region, province—the Qing added a fifth level, i.e., the General Governors and Regional Supervisors. Their immediate subordinates were the Regional Administrative Commissioners, followed by Sub-regional Administrators, Prefecture Governors, and County Magistrates. In times of war, however, the General Governors and Regional Supervisors had no say in decision making. The Emperor would send out his special envoys, such as Grand Commissioner and Grand Commander. The General Governors and Regional Supervisors were only entitled to receive orders and pass them down. All in all, the Qing government did not delegate any power to local officials.

The Manchu troops were called Eight-Banner soldiers, and they constituted the main military force of the country. They were stationed in all important military positions across the country. Below the Eight-Banner troops were the Green Camps, consisting of Han people but headed by Manchu generals. The Eight-Banner soldiers also enjoyed higher salaries than the Han troops. The General Governors and Regional Supervisors of the provinces were almost all of Manchu origin: only a small number of them were Han. During the more than 200 years of the Qing Dynasty, only one Han Chinese, Yue Zhongqi (1686–1754) was appointed to the position of Grand General to lead Manchu troops. It was only during the Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864) that the Manchu rulers, in desperation, appointed Zeng Guofan (1811–1872), Zuo Zongtang (1812–1885), Hu Linyi (1812–1861), and Li Hongzhang (1823–1901) to high positions. They helped the Qing government survive the crisis, and their success led to the appointment of Han officials to top positions in most border provinces. Around the time of and after the Sino-Japanese War of 1894, such positions were again mostly given to Manchu officials, with only a few Han officials remaining. We can see that Qing-dynasty politics was characterized by military rule. It was also tribally-based rule, as military power was held by the Manchu tribe.

5.3.3 Forbidden Areas in the Qing Dynasty

The worst point of the Qing Dynasty's self-interested system was their insecurity which prompted them to prepare an area exclusive to themselves. That area was the Three Provinces to the East of the Shanhai Pass. Han people were not allowed to enter there through the Shanhai Pass. As previously discussed, the Manchu were

originally a small tribal group by the Songhua River to the east of the Changbai Mountains. Their homeland was not the entire Three Provinces to the East of the Shanhai Pass. The land on both the eastern and western banks of the Liao River was part of China before the Qin Dynasty, and part of the State of Yan during the Warring States Period (475–221 BC). The Great Wall built during the First Emperor of Qin's rule (r. 246–210 BC) reached the Datong River on the eastern coast. At any rate, Fengtian Province (present-day Liaoning Province) in the Qing Dynasty had been part of China more than 2000 years and has remained so up to the present day; even so, the Qing Dynasty treated it as a no-go area for Han people. It was not until the late years of Emperor Guangxu's reign (1875–1908) that Han people from Hebei and Shandong provinces were allowed to open up farmland in the Three Provinces.

Taiwan was the second forbidden land. As uprisings happened from time to time under the administration of Zheng Chenggong (1624–1662), people in Fujian Province were not allowed to cross the straits to Taiwan. The underlying cause for making Taiwan a forbidden area was one of administration, whereas the land of the Three Provinces to the East of the Shanhai Pass were being kept as a bolt-hole for a possible retreat.

The third forbidden area was present-day Chahar and Suiyuan. While it was part of the country, the Qing government prohibited new settlement or opening up new farmland. That was because the land was close to Mongolia and the Qing government intended keeping the Han and the Mongol people separate. The prohibition was also canceled in the late years of the Guangxu Reign.

The fourth forbidden land was Xinjiang. That was because the Manchu rulers wanted to keep the fertile land, not yet opened up, for their own use, and so they forbade Han people to go there. It was not until Zuo Zongtang put down the rebellions of the Hui people (in the northwest) that the prohibition was relaxed, allowing Han people to go there freely.

These forbidden areas within the country came into being because of the Manchu rulers' self-interested machinations. Some became wasteland and others were developed very late. But Han people of the time also regarded China as being the so-called "18 provinces proper." This was an entirely wrong conception in terms of traditional history.

5.4 Imperial Examination for Selecting Officials Under Tribal Power

The Qing Dynasty's examination system to select officials does deserve the charge of being a "means to fool the people." Zou Rong (1885–1905) wrote in *The Revolutionary Army*, "The Manchu people account for a small portion of the population of the 18 provinces, but Manchu officials greatly outnumber Han officials. Take the ratio between Manchu and Han officials in the capital for example. Only the positions of Grand Scholars, Department Directors and Deputy Department Directors

are appointed in equal numbers of Manchu and Han candidates. The other positions all have a higher ratio of Manchu people. The Cabinet has six Manchu Scholars as against four Han Scholars; six Manchu and Mongol Instructors for the Emperor and the Princes as against two Han Instructors; 12 Manchu Senior Scholars against two Han Senior Scholars; 94 Manchu and Mongol Secretaries as against 30 Han Secretaries. In the Six Departments, there are about 400 Manchu Division Directors (under the Six Departments), and Deputy Division Directors, and staff: 30-plus in the Personnel Department, 100-plus in the Household Department, 30-plus in the Rituals Department, 40 in the Military Department, 70-plus in the Judiciary Department, and 80-plus in the Department of Works. In contrast, there are only 162 Han Division Directors, and Deputy Division Directors, and staff. Directors of government departments other than the Six Departments are all Manchu people, without any Han people. In the quarterly bulletin on official positions, only the Han Division Directors, and Deputy Division Directors, and staff are announced. There is no mention of positions taken by Manchu officials, which leads to the suspicion that something is being hidden. All in all, there are three times as many more Manchu directors, and deputy directors, and staff as Han counterparts. And this does not include the scribes. Since official positions in the provinces, prefectures, and sub-regions are filled by the relevant division directors under the Six Departments, it is no wonder that local offices around the country are filled by Manchu officials. As for the Departments for Ethnic Affairs, all the offices are staffed by Manchu officials, from the Department Director and deputies, down to the staff and storage keepers. There is not a single Han official. As for other positions in the Hanlin Academy and other offices at the central government, such as Director of the Hanlin Academy, the Office for Imperial Family Affairs, Department of Supervision, Department of Archives, the Court of Judicial Review, the Office for Rituals, the Office for Managing Horses and Animal Husbandry, the Office for Managing Banquets, the Office for Ethnic and Religious Affairs, the Office for Education, and the Office for Managing Imperial Chariots, etc., they all have more Manchu officials than Han ones. None have equal numbers of each." Zou Rong's description presents a true picture of the tribe-based governance of the Qing Dynasty.

The Chinese examination system for recruiting officials was meant to select real talent for the various government departments on the basis of opening up political power to the public. Now that the Qing rulers practiced tribal power, with no intention whatsoever of opening political power to the public, the examination for recruiting officials became a means of restricting talent. In other words, the examination was used as a limited compromise, allowing rather limited political power for Han people. Let me again quote Zou Rong, "In the examination for recruiting officials, while seven or eight out of ten are Han scholars, most of them are appointed to positions outside the official system. Those who have been given positions in the Hanlin Academy don't have salary enough to live a decent life. For them to be given a position in the official system or to climb up the ladders in the Hanlin Academy, that is more difficult than ascending to the sky or crossing the seas. The Qing rulers use such practices to appease the Han people. They have set up certain positions for managing education at the local level and appoint Jinshi scholars of Han origin to such positions, positions

of no real authority. Even though a tiny few of such scholars have been given such positions as Grand Scholar, Department Director, or Deputy Department Director, they are usually white-haired and toothless, with few years to enjoy the leftovers of Manchu officials. According to Qing rules, Han scholars are eligible for official positions only after qualifying for the Hanlin Academy, whereas Manchu people are eligible for both civil and military positions regardless of their background. There is deep meaning behind this.”

Zou Rong’s observations fully explain the status of the examination for recruiting officials under tribal power. Let me ask: In the selection and examination for recruiting officials in the Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, did the government give preference to those bearing the imperial family name and leave only limited opportunities to the rest of the qualified candidates? Even though those dynasties had the problems of imperial relatives and/or eunuchs abusing power, they were caused by occasional personnel corruption. There was no such a distinction in the system itself. Obviously, when we evaluate a system, we should not focus on the system alone. We should evaluate its effect and actual influence in relation to other government systems. Therefore, the examination system under the tribal power of the Yuan and Qing dynasties was not at all in the same class as the examination systems of other dynasties. It goes without saying. Before Zou Rong made his observations, there were others who had seen through the intentions of Manchu power, among them Gong Zizhen (1792–1841) and some others during the reigns of Emperor Daoguang (r. 1820–1850) and Emperor Xianfeng (r. 1850–1861). Back then, as the Han people were not allowed to openly criticize the Qing system, Gong Zizhen and people like him could only allude to it by criticizing examination systems in all the dynasties. They accused all the examination systems as tricks played by the emperors based on their self-interest. We should be aware of the differences between them when evaluating people and events in history.

5.5 Ruling Strategies of the Qing Dynasty

The Manchu people had conquered the Mongols before establishing their rule over all of China. Therefore, the Qing rulers adopted an emollient strategy towards the Mongols and Tibetans, especially the Mongols. They were biased against Koreans, because the latter remained loyal to the Ming Dynasty. They elevated the Mongols to family members by conferring on them such titles as prince, *beizi* and *beile*, the latter two being lower in status than a prince. In the Qing Dynasty, the Manchu people ranked first, Mongols second, and the Han people third. The Qing Emperors adhered to Lamaism, which is why they had the Yonghe Lama Temple built in Beijing. They used religion to win over the Mongols and the Tibetans. For them, religion was also a political tool. Therefore, they followed Lamaism and Confucius at the same time, but for them both beliefs were a political means to an end, rather than a religion. Afraid their own strength would not be enough to rule over China, the Manchu rulers chose to take the Mongols as their ally. Since the Mongols had once

ruled over China, the Manchu rulers treated them as real brothers. At the same time, they prohibited Mongols from doing business with Han people. To rule over places like Mongolia, the Qing government established the Department for Ethnic Affairs, somewhat similar to a present-day Ministry of Foreign Affairs. The Department was staffed by Manchu officials at the top and Mongols at the lower levels. There was no place for the Han. Such arrangement was brazenly imperialist in nature, to describe it in contemporary terms.

The term imperialism originated in the West. There was no such a thing in China. From the Qin down to the Ming Dynasty, China was never an imperialist country. An imperialist country must have conquered territory over which the government does not rule on equal terms, such as Hong Kong under British rule and India under British rule in the past.¹ The Governor of Hong Kong is appointed by the British government, as was the Governor of India in the past. The same was true with Vietnam, which had a governor appointed by the French government. To exercise a different rule over such conquered lands indicates its ruler as an imperialist. The Americans did not want the Philippines as part of the United States, nor did they want to send a Governor to rule there. That would make the US an imperialist country. The Governor of Hong Kong is appointed, in name, by the British monarch, not the British parliament, as was the case in the past with the Governor of India. Britain practices democratic politics in its own land, but does not allow democracy in its colonies, which are only affiliated to the British Empire. If the United States had appointed a Governor to rule over the Philippines, the US President would have become the same as the British monarch. That would have violated the spirit underlying the founding of the United States. The Americans did not want that, but nor did they want the Philippines to join the United States. This is why they allowed the Philippines to become independent. This is because every country has its own particular size, system, spirit underlying its establishment, and historical tradition. These things cannot be changed casually. Even though the Americans wanted to do business in the East, they would rather find other ways than to overturn their entire historical spirit by dispatching a Governor to rule over the Philippines. Therefore, for the Soviet Union to call the United States imperialist does not fit the facts. However, it is not wrong to say that Britain exercises imperial rule over Hong Kong. Britain divides its country into two parts: homeland and conquered land. That's exactly an imperialist country.

The division into the so-called "18 provinces proper" and other parts of China during the Qing Dynasty seems like the situation of a Western imperialist country. But if we examine the situation carefully, China was different. The Qing government treated the Mongols more favorably than the Han Chinese of the "18 provinces proper." Mongols could win titles such as princes, but Hans had no such chance. For the British to treat the people of Hong Kong better than its own people would be an impossibility. Clearly, even if we call it imperialist, the Qing Dynasty was different from Western imperialists. It is a problem of ours these days to casually appropriate terms used by others without making an effort to understand their exact meaning.

¹Hong Kong was under British rule at the time of the author's writing. China resumed the exercise of sovereignty over Hong Kong in 1997.

Westerners call the Qing Dynasty an empire and Emperor Kangxi “Emperor Kangxi the Great.” There were imperialist countries in the West and “Emperor So-and-So the Great,” but there was never such a system in China and never such an idea. But then, some of us like to call the Han Dynasty the “Great Han Empire” and even the First Emperor of Qin “First Qin Emperor the Great.” These are not proper names and we should be aware of the difference.

All the policies adopted by the Manchu tribe in their rule of China were meant to maintain their control over the Han people. They also took measures to win over the Mongols and the Tibetans as countervailing forces against the Han. This has already been mentioned. Now we come on to how they treated the Han people. When the Manchu took control of the country, the Han naturally rose in resistance and their leaders were naturally the scholars. So the Manchu rulers kept the traditional examination system to select officials open to Han scholars. In appearance, politics was still open to Han scholars: they were allowed to engage in politics, to take up official positions, and top-level ones for that matter. But in reality, the Manchu rulers designed a set of measures to guard against Han officials. For example, while central government departments had both Manchu and Han officials, the General Governor and Regional Supervisor were mostly Manchu people.

The most cunning maneuver of the Manchu rulers was to suppress Han scholars whilst ingratiating themselves with the common people at the lower level, for the purpose of disintegrating the strength of resistance. In brief summary, the Manchu rulers pacified non-Han ethnic groups to strengthen their rule over China, reduced the resistance of Han scholars by allowing them limited participation in politics, and by currying favor with the common people. Their consideration of all these three aspects was very thorough indeed. Kangxi and Yongzheng were both capable emperors. Under their rule, there was no freedom of speech, no freedom of association and publication, but there were horrifying literary inquisitions at times. There was no way for Han scholars to resist the multiple oppressions heaped on them.

Moreover, the Manchu rulers knew how to win over the common people. The Qing Dynasty adopted the so-called Land-Tax-Only policy: The government collected land tax only; there was no poll tax. This was vaunted by Qing rulers as their benevolent rule. In the 50th year of Emperor Kangxi’s reign, China had a population of 24.62 million. The Qing court issued a decree, promising never to impose a poll tax from that year on. The government would conduct a census every five years, but no poll tax would be imposed. Actually, this could not be counted as a benevolent policy, since the Two-season Taxation system of the Tang Dynasty had already merged poll tax with land tax. Later on (in the late Tang and the Song Dynasty), the government required farmers to contribute labor or pay tax money in lieu of labor, which was wrong. Wang Anshi (1021–1086) (of the Song Dynasty) made the policy of requiring the people to pay cash in lieu of labor, but the government required labor again after a while. For this reason the Ming Dynasty adopted the One-Whip Taxation system, which again merged labor tax with land tax. The Manchu rulers followed the Ming system and collected land tax according to the standard set during the Wanli Reign (1573–1620) of the Ming Dynasty. By that standard, labor tax was already merged with the land tax, but the Qing government still required farmers to contribute labor.

When Emperor Kangxi once again merged poll tax with land tax, he was merely following the trend of Chinese history. Of all changes he made, the biggest was restoration of the land tax standard set in the Wanli reign of the Ming Dynasty. This was the optimal choice for the Qing government, so how could they vaunt it as their benevolence? Furthermore, the total tax increased after the merging. This is why the policy pretty soon lost favor with the people. In essence, with poll tax being merged with land tax, population growth would result in people feeling no responsibility toward the country. Even today, the common people of China seem to feel no obligation for the country, except those who own land or houses. This is not a good system at all. All in all, the Qing system had little worth praising today.

5.6 Popular Resistance Movements

I often say there is no system in history that could remain sound and last forever; still less the Qing system, which consisted of political techniques improvised out of self-interest. How could it last for long? The Qing rulers wanted to win favor with the people, not a bad thing in itself. However, they made a point of oppressing the scholars; they needed obedient functionaries, not officials of integrity. That's why politics of the Qing Dynasty was slavish, mediocre, irresponsible, corrupt, and spiritless. Under corrupt politics, the people could not gain any benefit even when the government wanted to win their favor. During Emperor Qianlong's reign (1735–1796), Manchu officials became increasingly wanton, and corruption in politics went from bad to worse. By then the Han scholars had lost any sense of resistance, but the common people at the lower level had had enough suffering. They rose up in revolt again and again, despite government suppression. The most famous were the so-called religious rebels of Sichuan and Hubei (and several other provinces). The Qing government had to put in huge effort to put down the rebellions, without solving the root problems. Therefore, even if the Qing government had not suffered the various invasions by Western countries, it would still have collapsed.

Uprisings happened frequently during the Jiaqing Reign (1796–1820), leading to the most serious case of Taiping Rebellion later on. We sympathize with the Taipings, on the grounds of it being a revolution by Han people. But that view is not fully in accordance with the facts. Their leaders knew too little about politics. During their ten-year-plus occupation of Nanjing, their capital, the Taiping leaders did little to establish a political system. They did pretty well in the military system, but even there they failed to recognize the importance of a navy. They attempted to allocate land to the common people on an equal basis and might have some rough ideas of socialism. In terms of politics, however, they were too ignorant.

First of all, the name of their regime was unfortunate. How could they call their formally established state Taiping Tianguo (Kingdom of Heavenly Peace)? To do so only exposed their shallow knowledge of Western Christianity. The "Kingdom's" Leaders possibly adapted the Way of Supreme Peace (Taiping Dao) under which the Yellow Turban Rebellion erupted in the Eastern Han Dynasty. Their choice of regime

name was a portent of failure, as such a name went against historical traditions. It failed because it had too few scholars, and demonstrated the Qing's success in separating scholars from people lower down in society. The Xinhai Revolution of 1911, which gave birth to the Republic of China, was different because there were scholars among the revolutionaries.

Hong Xiuquan (1814–1864) claimed to be the Heavenly King, Yang Xiuqing (1823–1856) the East King, and they gave their followers such titles as South King, West King, North King, and King of the Wings. Such names existed only in popular tales. How could the Taiping Kingdom of Heavenly Peace establish a political system when they used such titles? After Yang Xiuqing was killed in their internal conflict, more followers were conferred ever more absurd variations of the title “King.” For example, the son of Xiao Chaogui (c. 1820–1852) was called Young West King, Hong Renfa (1805–1864) and Hong Renda (?–1864) were respectively called Elder Brother of the King and Second Brother of the King. Even the Manchu tribe, when they first established rule over the country, did not appear so vulgar and ignorant. The Manchu rulers appointed scholars in their system, but Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing did not. Under Taiping rule, Confucius temples were burned and Confucian books were banned as heresy. Thanks to its attempt to overturn an entire traditional culture, the Taiping regime was bound to fail, even if the Qing government had not had Zeng Guofan and Zuo Zongtang to suppress them. Below the rank of kings, there were such titles as Heavenly Prime Minister. How totally ridiculous!

How could the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace succeed without any knowledge of China's historical traditions but by relying on shallow knowledge of a foreign religion? How could they achieve anything at all, given their use of such nonsensical titles as Heavenly Fathers and Brothers? We can tell the failure of the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace, just from the name of the regime and their official titles, quite aside from any other consideration. The whole of Chinese history would have been a failure if the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace had succeeded. Hong Xiuquan and Yang Xiuqing might have been able to overthrow the Qing Dynasty, had they not attempted to repudiate the entire history of China at the same time. The Han people in modern history also wanted to repudiate the entire history of China, which is why they sympathized with the Taipings. At any rate, while the Kingdom of Heavenly Peace failed, political power in the Qing government gradually shifted into the hands of Han officials. More Han officials were appointed to top positions in the provinces, and the armies formed by Zeng Guofan in Hunan and Li Hongzhang in Anhui became the main strength of the Qing Dynasty. This shifting of power later forced the Qing government to reform.

5.7 Reform and Revolution

We shall now talk about the reform and revolution after the fall of the Taiping Kingdom of Heavenly Peace. The advocate of revolution was Dr. Sun Yatsen (1866–1925) and the advocate of reform was Kang Youwei (1858–1927). Kang's ideas were not

completely wrong. He argued that it did not matter whether or not a country had an Emperor, provided that it established a Constitution. At the time, Britain had a Queen, Germany, Japan, and Italy all had an Emperor. China did not have to overthrow our Emperor. As long as we could establish and implement a Constitution, it would be all right to allow the Manchu Emperor to stay on the throne. Kang knew only that it would be all right to have an Emperor provided we had a Constitution at the same time. What he did not realize was that the Qing Emperor represented the political power of the Manchu tribe, and that such a political power would never allow a Constitution. Dr. Sun advocated for revolution to overthrow the Emperor; Kang advocated reform while keeping the Emperor on the throne. Kang mistakenly believed that provided the Emperor would follow his advice, reform would be possible and successful. He was mistaken because he did not understand, as Westerners did, the political concept of sovereignty. He did not understand that the politics of China at the time was run by the Manchu tribe, rather than by the Emperor alone. He mistakenly thought the problem with Chinese traditional politics was an autocratic Emperor, and, that provided the Emperor took his (Kang's) advice, he would no longer be autocratic but would abide by the Constitution.

When the reform led by Kang Youwei and Liang Qichao (1873–1929) failed, Liang sighed: In our 2000-year Chinese history everything has happened but a real revolution. What he said made sense, but what he didn't know was that there had been no need for revolution in Chinese traditional politics until their time. Revolution had become necessary in their time because only revolution could overthrow the political power of the Manchu tribe. Like Kang Youwei, Liang Qichao also mistakenly saw Chinese traditional politics since the Qin and Han dynasties as being an autocratic system under an Emperor. Autocratic rule by the Emperor was a political system, a system that could be changed through reform. That was enough. He did not realize that the system was backed by a force. The Emperor alone was not enough to uphold such an autocratic system; he had the entire Manchu tribe behind him. Now that Emperor Guangxu could not detach himself from the Manchu group, how could he reform the system? Nothing short of a revolution was needed to overthrow the power of the Manchu group.

The force behind the Qing government was what the Communists these days call standpoint and background. Traditional government in Chinese history, the Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties, was not the self-interested power, stand and background of a particular group of people. The traditional government had the entire population, or the whole society, as its stand and background. When politics became corrupt, those who ran it were replaced by different people, some revisions were made to the corrupt system, and the same type of government continued. For this reason there were only uprisings in Chinese history, no revolution. No previous dynasty was backed by a self-interested force, so when a government became corrupt, they had no real backing force to prevent us restoring order out of chaos. The Qing Dynasty had such a force, so we had to bring it down. Such a situation called for a revolution. Therefore, the rise of the Tang Dynasty and the rise of the Song Dynasty were not the results of revolution, but the results of personnel change or, at the most, of reform. By the end of the Qing Dynasty, revolution had become inevitable, since the Qing

government, which had ruled China for more than 200 years, was different from the governments of the Han, Tang, Song, and Ming dynasties. In Western terms, sovereign power was in the hands of the Manchu group. A revolution was needed to bring down the Manchu group, to bring down their political privilege. We cannot say that political sovereignty in the Han Dynasty was in the hands of the Liu family, or in the hands of the Li family in the Tang Dynasty. Since the Han Dynasty, there were few cases of such political privilege in Chinese traditional politics. I analyzed and demonstrated this earlier when I described the political systems of the Han and Tang dynasties. Now in the Qing Dynasty, political power was controlled by a special group of people, the Manchu tribe.

If we discuss political sovereignty and political system separately, there were two different views. Kang Youwei represented that of reformists, advocating of reform rather than revolution. He focused on political system without considering political sovereignty. Zhang Taiyan (1869–1936) represented the view of revolutionaries, who favored revolution over reform. Zhang focused on political sovereignty without considering political system. Somewhere between these views, Dr. Sun regarded revolution as an essential prelude to a change of system, of which the element was abolition of the imperial hereditary system. He saw no need for an Emperor at all. He wanted to establish a new system by referring to both Chinese and Western, ancient and modern systems. Kang and Zhang were both scholars, so their views were rather bookish. Dr. Sun, on the other hand, was a great statesman with the learning of a scholar. His view was different because of his deep observation of politics and society, and his knowledge of both China and the West.

With the fall of the Qing Dynasty, the entire history and culture of China were also overturned. It so happened because the people of the time regarded the political system of the Qing Dynasty as the same as the traditional political system since the First Emperor of Qin. Another mistake was their simplistic view of the traditional political system as an autocratic system under an Emperor, thereby extending their dissatisfaction with the Qing government to traditional politics in history, and eventually to China's entire history and traditional culture. When a country's entire traditional culture is overturned, the people lose their common respect for and belief in their past traditions. A country's politics cannot be separated from political power. Stable politics depends on a spiritual power that the general public respect and believe in. No politics can be established if a political power is overthrown before its replacement is established. Therefore, Dr. Sun was right in pointing out the need of psychological preparation for the establishment of a new system.

Take for example the examination system for selecting officials. As a long-standing system in Chinese history, this system had a strong spiritual support behind it. However, Dr. Sun met with many difficulties and setbacks when he reinstated the system, since the respect for and belief in the system as shared by the people was gone with the fall of the Qing Dynasty. To reestablish the examination system, it was necessary first to rebuild people's trust in it. During its rule of more than 200 years, the Qing Dynasty always ran the examination, at both provincial and national levels, on the same dates, without ever any change. It was able to do so because the people shared a common respect for and belief in the system. The system was sustained

not by the strength of itself, nor by any political force, but by the people's common respect and belief. The same holds true for any politics and any system.

Today, some people seem to take an experimental attitude towards political systems. They are ready to experiment with a system based on a particular theory, even without the environment in which the system has won people's common respect and belief. That was a big problem. Sometimes they are happy to appropriate and experiment with something which another country has just tried for a month or two, or a new theory created by a few people. How can any politics be established without a history or any system be established without traditions? We insist that Chinese history is no good and that Chinese society has to be reformed entirely. Such thought confuses political system with revolutionary slogans, and such slogans simply ignore historical facts. The issue has changed from overthrowing a certain kind of politics and a certain system, from reforming a society and an economy, to discarding our entire culture.

It is clear that when discussing thought and theory we cannot talk about one part without involving some other part. We cannot draw a conclusion without thorough consideration and without testing a theory over a long period of time.

Glossary

Cabinet	内阁	
Cabinet Grand Scholar	内阁大学士 Neigedaxueshi	
Compiler	(翰林院) 编修 Bianxiu	
County Magistrate	知县 Zhixian	
county school	县学 Xianxue	
Court of Judicial Review	大理寺 Dalisi	
Department Director	尚书 Shangshu	
Departments for Ethnic Affairs	理藩院 Lifanyuan	
Department of Archives	通政司 Tongzhengsi	
Department of Supervision	都察院 Duchayuan	
Department of Works	工部 Gongbu	
Deputy Department Director	侍郎 Shilang	
Division Director, and Deputy Division Director, and staff	郎中员外主事 waizhushi	Langzhongyuan-
Eight-Banner troops/soldiers	八旗兵 Baqibing	
General Govenor	总督 Zongdu	
Grand Commander	参赞大臣 Canzandachen	
Grand Commissioner	经略大臣 Jingluedachen	
Grand General	大将军 Dajiangjun	

Grand Scholar	大学士 Daxueshi
Green Camp	绿营 Luying
Hanlin Academy	翰林院 Hanlinyuan
Heavenly Prime Minister	天官丞相 Tianguanchengxiang
Household Department	户部 Hubu
imperial decrees	圣旨 Shengzhi
Instructors for the Emperor and the Princes	侍读学士 Shiduxueshi
Junior Editor	(翰林院) 检讨 Jiantao
Kingdom of Heavenly Peace	太平天国 (国号) Taipingtianguo
Land-Tax-Only	地丁摊粮 Didingtianliang
literary inquisitions	文字狱 Wenziyu
Military Council	军机处 Junjichu
Military Councilors	军机大臣 Junjidachen
Military Department	兵部 Bingbu
Military Department Director	兵部尚书 Bingbushangshu
Nine High Officials	九卿 Jiuqing
non-Han ethnic group	藩属 Fanshu
Office for Education	国子监 Guozijian
Office for Ethnic and Religious Affairs	鸿胪寺 Honglusi
Office for Imperial Family Affairs	宗人府 Zongrenfu
Office for Managing Banquets	光禄寺 Guanglusi
Office for Managing Horses and Animal Husbandry	太仆寺 Taipusi
Office for Managing Imperial Chariots	鸾仪衙门 Luanyiyamen
Office for Military Affairs	办理军机处 Banlijunjichu
Office for Rituals	太常寺 Taichangsi
Open Dispatch Decrees	明发上谕 Mingfashangyu
Personnel Department	吏部 Libu
Prefecture Governor	知府 Zhifu
prefecture school	府学 Fuxue
prince	亲王 Qinwang
Provincial Inspecting Commissioner	臬台 (按察使) Nietai
Provincial Inspecting Commissioner	按察使 Anchashi
Regional Administrative Commissioner	布政使 (“承宣布政使”简称) Buzhengshi
Regional Administrative Commissioners	藩台 (布政使) Fantai
Regional Supervisor	巡抚 Xunfu

Reviewer	给事中 Jishizhong
Rituals Department	礼部 Libu
Sealed Envelope Decrees	寄信上谕 Jixinshangyu
Secretary	中书 Zhongshu
Senior Scholar	侍读 Shidu
Seven High Officials	七卿 Qiqing
Six Executive Departments	六部 Liubu
status distinction	流品 Liupin
Storage Keeper	(理藩院) 司库 Siku
Sub-region	道 Dao
Sub-regional Administrator	道员 Daoyuan
Taiping Rebellion (1851–1864)	太平天国 (之役) Taipingtianguo
the lecture hall	明伦堂 Mingluntang
the scribes	笔帖式 Bitieshi
the Sino-Japanese War of 1894	甲午战争 Jiawuzhanzheng
top-level decrees	上谕 Shangyu
Way of Supreme Peace	太平道 Taipingdao
Wenhua Hall	文华殿 Wenhudian
Wuying Hall	武英殿 Wuyingdian
Yellow Turban Rebellion	黄巾之乱 Huangjinzhiluan

Concluding Summary

After the five lectures, I wish to share some simple thoughts with you. Concerning traditional politics over the past 2000 years from the Qin (221–206 BC) to the Qing Dynasty (1616–1912), at the very least we should no longer regard it as mere autocracy. To be fair, there were many problems as well as much valuable experience in politics over the past 2000 years. Politics has gone through continuous revisions in the past and will continue to do so in the future. We can summarize several main trends in traditional politics over the past 2000 years. Here, I would like to reiterate some bad trends only, leaving aside the good ones for the moment.

First, the central government tended to become more and more centralized. This was good on one hand, because a country should have a stable central government. With the progress of politics, it is natural for political power to be centralized. It is the same with any country. Political power was divided (among feudal states) during the feudal era and gradually became centralized (as the country became unified). Even from the Han (206 BC–AD 220) to the Tang (AD 618–907) dynasties, there was a tendency for power to become over-centralized. In the Song (960–1279), Ming (1368–1644), and Qing dynasties, too much centralization of power led to the deterioration of local politics. Centralization of power still remains a major issue in the present. Dr. Sun Yat-sen (1866–1925) also noticed the issue. He raised the question of how to build up new county politics and how to reform the old province-based system. His thinking really deserves our careful study. We should be aware of the long tendency towards centralization of power in history, along with deterioration of local politics. With local officials losing their status and local politics deteriorating by the day, the entirety of politics was controlled by the central government. That was not a good phenomenon. Given the fact that the Republic of China (1912–1949) was unable to achieve successful and stable unification in the past decades, politically it is absolutely correct to strive for national unity. How to achieve and maintain national unity without over-centralization of power while making an effort to improve local politics? This is the first and foremost issue we should tackle.

Secondly, Chinese traditional politics encouraged different social classes to become equal. Traditional politics always restrained capitalism, from the Han through to the Qing Dynasty. All dynasties restrained privileges to a particular group of people, except for the Yuan (1206–1368) and the Qing, which were run under tribal politics. The feudal society was overthrown long ago. There were large families of prestigious social status in the Eastern Han Dynasty (AD 25–220) onward, but such families had already declined by the late Tang Dynasty. Ever since the Song Dynasty, the Chinese society remained equal: feudal aristocrat titles, such as dukes and earls, had long been abolished; official positions were not inheritable; political power was open to anyone able to pass relevant examinations.

Such an equal society had a problem, too. The problem was lack of any social force. Two people noticed this. One was Gu Yanwu (1613–1682, also known as Gu Tinglin), who lived in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasty. Gu wanted to stage a revolution to drive out the Manchu rulers, but could not find any social force. In Shanxi Province, he found a Pei Village, where all the villagers were originally from the same family. The forefathers of the Pei family had been very influential in the Tang Dynasty, several of them holding the position of Prime Minister. Hundreds, even thousands, of Pei families still lived together by the end of the Ming Dynasty. This Pei Village reminded Gu that only a feudal society had social forces. When an enemy invaded the country, even when the central government collapsed, there were social forces capable of resisting. However, Gu's idea of a feudal society was not one with a privileged class, but one in which political power was divided. In his ideal society, the central government would delegate power to local governments so that the latter could sustain political power if the former fell. This was Gu's painstaking thought.

The other person was Dr. Sun Yat-sen. To prepare for revolution, Dr. Sun went abroad but only won the support of some intellectuals. Knowing that these intellectuals did not represent sufficient strength, he made use of the strength of the numerous gangs and secret societies in Chinese society. Their force as organizations was not the same as that of the feudal society or the capitalist society. They represented a usable force because they were organized. In the West, a large factory may have thousands, perhaps tens of thousands of workers. When they are incited by a political party to go on strike, they can exert huge influence. These workers represent a force because they are organized. In modern Chinese society, no such forces existed. Everyone was equal and unrelated. Only students could be called on to boycott classes, to take to the street, and could appear in hundreds or thousands. That was the only force. When Western society transformed from feudal to capitalist, the large landlords became large factory owners. They had control over the masses, who could be organized into a social force. Chinese traditional politics always restrained capitalism; when the feudal class was overthrown, there was no capitalist force and everyone became equal in society. In a sense, the Chinese were the most equal and the freest. Dr. Sun saw this most clearly. Chinese society was too equal, too free to have any social force.

Now that all were equal, the key question was who should administrate politics? If the government was high above this equal society, who should rise to become

officials, to administer power? Chinese traditional politics prescribed that only scholars could enter politics, scholars who had passed the selection examinations. Most scholars came from the countryside. Even when they became officials, their children might not become officials. Children from other families, probably poor ones, could become officials by dint of studying hard. This was a good practice. However, as the number of scholars grew, the number of officials also increased. Since political power was open to all, the intelligent and the talented all aspired to official position, and craftsmen and merchants were looked down on in consequence.

It was different in the West, where politics was not open to the common people. Even feudal aristocrats were not entitled to official posts. Therefore, the intelligent and the talented entered industries and commerce. Once they built up their strength they began demanding political power. This was how Western society became what it is. In China, scholars were encouraged to excel in learning in order to become officials. The intelligent all devoted themselves to learning so as to become officials, which resulted in their bloated representation in politics. That was bad for politics, just as extra fat is bad for a person. Unfortunately, the situation still obtains today.

Thirdly, everyone wishes for lasting order and stability. However, under these circumstances, scholars-turned-officials could hardly perpetuate the family glory beyond the third generation. While it was possible for a man from a poor family to rise to eminence via hard study, his offspring might well grow up as privileged wastrels. Then a diligent young man from another poor family would rise to high position through hard work. Most of the Prime Ministers of the Song and Ming dynasties came from poor families. Emperors, on the other hand, could pass on the throne down two or three hundred years, as long as the country enjoyed peace. Whereas ten years previously the Prime Minister might have been a poor scholar reading under a thatched roof in the countryside, the Emperor enjoyed royal traditions for nine or ten generations. This is why the status and dignity of the Emperor and the power of the imperial family kept on rising, whereas the power of the government (as represented by the Prime Minister) kept dwindling. This was a major problem in Chinese traditional politics. Even though it ceased to exist in modern times, we should be aware of the problem when we read history in order to reach a reasonable understanding of Chinese politics in the past.

Fourthly, the Chinese political system became increasingly complicated during its long history of development. When one system became problematic, another one was devised to solve the problems, but the process tended to exacerbate some problems. The more complicated the system, the more it frustrated talent. The trend made politics in later dynasties appear less sound than that of earlier times. If we take a factual and fair look at history, we can see that Chinese politics always emphasized rule by law, that is, rule under a system. Modern politics in the West actually emphasized rule of man, rule by reality. Why? Because all their political systems are based on election. The majority party is entitled to decide everything. Their legal system is decided and revised in accordance with the opinion of the majority. That's why we say their system emphasizes the role of man and reality. Under our traditional politics, a system usually remained unchanged for several

hundred years. We call that rule by law or political system. Under rule by law, talent was restrained. Huang Zongxi (1610–1695, also known as Huang Lizhou) in the late Ming Dynasty complained that “there’s rule of man, not rule of law.” Huang proposed to stress rule by law rather than rule by man. Rule by law does not necessarily mean autocratic rule. In Chinese history, as more talents rose to official positions, fewer and fewer of them were able to exercise their abilities to the full. If we are not able to break away from the limitations of the complicated traditional system, our politics will struggle to perform well. As I have just mentioned, there were too many people in Chinese society wanting to enter politics. Once inside the corridors of power, they were inevitably constrained by the complicated system. This was the root cause for the poor performance of Chinese politics.

Today, China’s politics has taken a new road. Still, it would be wrong for us to ignore what happened in history. The problems in traditional politics are a present reality as well as history. The essence remains the same, despite the changed appearance. How can we afford not to give them careful study? For example, our misconception that all traditional politics should be overthrown did indeed lead to its being cast away. At the same time, however, we have lost common respect for and faith in all traditions and customs. Gone is the Emperor as the paramount ruler for thousands of years. No matter how politics change, the country has to be united. To unite the country, power must be centralized. How can the central government win the people’s trust? This has remained a big issue since the Revolution of 1911. It is difficult to do so without establishing a system that the entire population can respect and trust. Is it not even more difficult to strengthen the central government while at the same time giving consideration to local governance?

As I have mentioned above, Chinese society long ago become an equal society. All social forces being equal and unrelated made it difficult for any of them to achieve anything. The society was non-organized and non-united. However, we describe this same society in two opposite terms. On the one hand, we call it a feudal society; on the other, we call our society a heap of loose sand. We are unaware that a feudal society is not non-united; a non-united society cannot be a feudal society. If we do not take the Western capitalist road in the future, how should we design new politics to encourage society to coalesce around something deserving the respect and trust of everyone? This is also an extremely important issue in politics today.

Now that the imperial family is down and the Emperor gone, it is easy to say that the sovereignty of politics belongs to the people and now is the time of democratic rights. In reality, however, how could the 450 million people in China directly exercise political power all at once? Dr. Sun Yat-sen once said the 450 million people were all like Adou (AD 207–271) [the weak and incapable son of Liu Bei (AD 161–223), King of the State of Shu (AD 221–263) of the Three Kingdoms Period (AD 220–280)]. And how right he was! For this reason, Dr. Sun proposed the separation of political sovereignty and administrative power. Dr. Sun was no closeted academic. His view was not copied from any Western source, but based on his deep knowledge and foresight. The government should belong to the people, but political power is not and should not be exercised directly by the people. In theory,

the political power of a country naturally belongs to the people and should be run according to popular opinion. However, popular opinion is an empty word. How is such opinion to be expressed? Today, most of the people still rely on the government for instruction and leadership. How are they able to take part in politics? A country should always have a (political) anchor that remains stable. In present-day Japan, the prestige of the Emperor, historically the traditional anchor (of politics), has been shaken and Japanese society has been shaken at the same time. What is their replacement for the Emperor? How will they keep their society together? This is an issue Japan will have to deal with in the future. China will face this issue too. In fact, we have been facing it for a long time.

There's one last point I wish to emphasize. In the future, how will China simplify its various social and political systems so that its talent can develop freely? This is the most important thing. We cannot achieve this goal by discarding everything of the past. The key is to rebuild, rather than overthrow everything that is old. We say we are going to establish rule by law, but our current bureaucratic system has so many tiers and is so complicated that everyone gets trapped once inside it. There is no way to turn around. As for the word democracy, we seem to take it to mean that everything must be discussed collectively. The result is meeting after meeting and circulation of documents, which are enough to stifle the emergence of anyone's ability in politics. We keep complaining about lack of laws, but the thing that is actually lacking is not law, but talent. It's not that we lack people of talent, but that such people have no way of exercising their ability. Each age has its own political system and its own human talent. Chaos occurs when people cannot bring their talent into play, due to the frustrations of the political system. It is the responsibility of our generation to blaze a new trail, to create a new political system, to use new talent, by selectively adopting new trends from the West and drawing on our own experience of the past.

Politics is no easy matter. In recent history, only the United Kingdom has sustained its political system for several centuries. Other countries managed to sustain theirs for several decades or a hundred years or so before falling. We should not just look to other countries and attempt to learn everything from outside. Their systems and laws are not perfect, either, but those countries keep renewing their systems and laws. When they recognize something as wrong, they are able to correct it. We, on the other hand, have been intent on copying others; still less have we woken up (to political innovation). The United Kingdom has enjoyed a sustainable political system, but we cannot copy it wholesale. This is because the United Kingdom is a small island country with a small population, whereas China is a big continental country with a large population. Even though the United States was established by people from Britain, it did not entirely follow the example of its mother country. France has also enjoyed a long political system, but it has become problematic now. As for Germany, Italy, Japan, we can say they do not yet have any reliable political experience. To make a bolder remark, I would describe the political experience of the West as a whole as relatively short and shallow. Only we Chinese can make this observation: China had more advanced politics than the West. This is historical fact, not a nationalistic exaggeration. Only Dr. Sun Yat-sen

said this previously. Today, some of us stand against our own traditions and want to write off our history of 2000 years. How can we obliterate what has already become history? Other countries have their own respective histories. How can we mix ours with theirs? This topic involves the whole issue of culture, a very complicated topic.

I don't think I should talk about empty theory, but I can talk about history. British philosopher Bertrand Russell (1872–1970) once remarked that one role of philosophy is to make people less arbitrary. I think studying history can make people even less arbitrary. Many things are so complicated that it takes time for their merits and demerits to be seen clearly, which is possible only through study of history. We can learn many things by studying history. Nothing can be explained in a single sentence. History represents objective facts. There is no wrong history. We will be in the wrong if we fail to pay attention to history and to take history as a reference. Those of us who study humanities must have an understanding of history, and politics is a discipline of humanities. It is necessary that we turn and reexamine what has gone before in history.

Translator's Notes

The historian Ch'ien Mu (1895–1990), author of this book, was a professor at Yenching University and Peking University among others. He went to Hong Kong in 1949, where he founded the Asia Evening College of Arts and Commerce, later to become the New Asia College. In 1967, he relocated to Taipei, where he taught at the College of Chinese Culture (present-day Chinese Culture University). A member of Academia Sinica, he was also a special researcher for the Taipei Palace Museum. Ch'ien Mu was made an Honorary Doctor of Humane Letters by Yale University in 1960.

Ch'ien Mu published very extensively. His works include: *A General Introduction to Chinese Classics*; *A Scholastic History of China in the Last 300 Years*; *A General History of China*, and *An Introduction to Chinese Cultural History*. His scholarship covered the broad sweep of Chinese history—from the time when the First Emperor of Qin united China to the end of the Qing in 1911: Qin (221–206 BC); Han (206 BC–AD 220); the period spanning the Three Kingdoms, the Western and Eastern Jin, and the Southern and Northern Dynasties (220–589); Sui (581–618); Tang (618–907); the period covering the Five Dynasties and Ten States (907–979); the period including Liao, Song, Western Xia, and Jin (907–1279); Yuan (1206–1368); Ming (1368–1644); and Qing (1616–1911).

This current volume, *Merits and Demerits of Political Systems in Dynastic China*, is much smaller in scale; it is meant to be an accessible reader for those interested in Chinese history, in the political systems of ancient China in particular.

Chi'en Mu selected the Han, Tang, Song, Ming, and Qing dynasties as the subjects of this treatise. The reasons for his selection are explained in the author's own Foreword: one, the content is based on five lectures he delivered, so the number of dynasties was limited by the number of lectures; two, "as the most important of the dynasties, these five can, in general terms, represent the entire course of Chinese history." Each chapter deals with: the organization of government at central and local levels; the selection of government officials; the economic system, predominantly taxation policies; the military system; comments on the

merits and demerits of the political systems. A Concluding Summary follows the five chapters.

A professor of history as well as historian, Ch'ien Mu based his lectures on solid research, combining both historical facts and anecdotes. When published in book form, the text has the features of spoken language, which makes it easy to read. Though the language flows easily, the rich connotations of the historical references may not always be immediately crystal clear to the translator: One small anecdote may have a complex historical background. Therefore, it is most important for the translator to understand the content fully and, despite having a basic systematic knowledge of my own country's history, I am no historian. Therefore, the gratitude of FLTRP editors and me for the English edition is owed to our academic consultant Doctor Liu Jiang for ensuring accurate understanding of every historical detail. Dr. Liu graduated from the History Department of Peking University and is currently teaching at Shanghai Normal University. Throughout the translation and editing process, Dr. Liu provided detailed written answers to more than a hundred inquiries from us. His assistance has been essential to the quality of the English translation.

Three of my FLTRP colleagues—Zhao Yaru, Duan Huixiang, and Lin Hong—took part in the editing process, all three contributing valuable suggestions to my translation. Yaru, in particular, assisted me in searching and checking information whenever needed. Her rigorous and efficient work allowed me to concentrate on the translation itself.

To make sure that the English edition reads as fluently as the original Chinese, FLTRP enlisted the work of Ms. Susan Duncan in polishing the translation. A native of the United Kingdom who graduated in Chinese from the University of London, Susan has many years' experience in editing English translations of Chinese books on behalf of reputable publishers in China. She makes a point of comparing with the Chinese original and is highly appreciated for her subtle rendering of nuance.

In this work, Professor Ch'ien Mu uses historical facts to present traditional Chinese political systems as a continuous development. This is most conspicuous in the organization of government in different dynasties, the names of government offices, and the titles and responsibilities of officials. Continuous development does not mean the absence of change. All these aspects underwent certain changes from one dynasty to another while retaining certain similarities. In translating the names of government offices and the titles of officials, I have stressed their functions and responsibilities respectively so that the translations convey straightforward meanings. The reader may notice that some offices bear similar names but perform different functions in different dynasties, and vice versa. Therefore, I have compiled a glossary of organization names and official titles for each chapter, as a convenient reference.

Although the author's focus is on five dynasties only, he inevitably needs to refer to and make comparison with other dynasties, their emperors, and the emperors' respective reign periods. So as to clarify the historical context I suggested that the English edition should include an appendix listing all the dynasties

in Chinese history. In table form, the list includes the following: the name and the posthumous or temple title (the most commonly used) of each emperor; the reign title(s) or the different periods during the reign of a particular emperor; and the Western calendar equivalent for dates calculated by the Chinese traditional method.

My very close attention to the text in translating this work brought an increasing appreciation of how Ch'ien Mu combined true scholarship with lively interest, engaging today's readers through his interweaving of facts and anecdotes from history. His critical appraisals of Chinese traditional politics are sharp but not caustic, his viewpoints personal but not extreme or biased. I believe readers will enjoy reading the English edition from their own perspective and will discover different aspects that particularly appeal.

Zhang Siying

Appendix

我国历代纪元表

Chronology of Chinese History

1. 本表从“五帝”开始, 到 1949 年中华人民共和国成立为止。 This chronology runs from the period of the “Five August Emperors” up to the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949.
2. “五帝”以后, 西周共和元年 (公元前 841 年) 以前, 参考 2000 年公布的《夏商周年表》进行了调整。 The period from the end of the “Five August Emperors” to the 1st year of the Gonghe reign of the Western Zhou Dynasty (841 B.C.) has been adjusted according to the Chronology of the Xia, Shang, and Zhou dynasties published in 2000.
3. 较小的王朝如“十六国”“十国”等不列表。 Small regimes are not listed, such as the Sixteen States Periods and the Ten States Periods.
4. 各个时代或王朝, 详列帝王名号 (“帝号”或“庙号”, 以习惯上常用者为据), 年号, 元年的干支和公元纪年, 以资对照。(年号后用括号附列使用年数, 年中改元时在干支后用数字注出改元的月份。) The rulers of every period or dynasty are listed, including their temple titles or posthumous titles whichever is the better known, reign titles, the name of the 1st year of a reign according to the traditional Chinese calendar, and the corresponding year according to the Gregorian calendar. (The number in parentheses on the right of the reign title is the number of years the reign lasted. If a reign title was changed in the middle of a year, the month in which it was changed is given after the name of the year in traditional Chinese calendar.)

干支次序表

Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches

(Translator's Note: The 10 Heavenly Stems are: 甲 *jia*, 乙 *yi*, 丙 *bing*, 丁 *ding*, 戊 *wu*, 己 *ji*, 庚 *geng*, 辛 *xin*, 壬 *ren*, and 癸 *gui*. The 12 Earthly Branches are: 子 *zi*, 丑 *chou*, 寅 *yin*, 卯 *mao*, 辰 *chen*, 巳 *si*, 午 *wu*, 未 *wei*, 申 *shen*, 酉 *you*, 戌 *xu*, and 亥 *hai*. Traditional Chinese calendar calculated the passage of years, months, days and hours by combining one Heavenly Stem and one Earthly Branch to form 60 unique pairs in a complete cycle. In the lunar calendar in use today, only years and days are marked by such cyclic pairings. In this chronology, they indicate years.)

1. 甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	2. 乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	3. 丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	4. 丁卯 <i>ding-mao</i>
5. 戊辰 <i>wu-chen</i>	6. 己巳 <i>ji-si</i>	7. 庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	8. 辛未 <i>xin-wei</i>
9. 壬申 <i>ren-shen</i>	10. 癸酉 <i>gui-you</i>	11. 甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	12. 乙亥 <i>yi-hai</i>
13. 丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	14. 丁丑 <i>ding-chou</i>	15. 戊寅 <i>wu-yin</i>	16. 己卯 <i>ji-mao</i>
17. 庚辰 <i>geng-chen</i>	18. 辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	19. 壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	20. 癸未 <i>gui-wei</i>
21. 甲申 <i>jia-shen</i>	22. 乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	23. 丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	24. 丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>
25. 戊子 <i>wu-zi</i>	26. 己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	27. 庚寅 <i>geng-yin</i>	28. 辛卯 <i>xin-mao</i>
29. 壬辰 <i>ren-chen</i>	30. 癸巳 <i>gui-si</i>	31. 甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	32. 乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>
33. 丙申 <i>bing-shen</i>	34. 丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	35. 戊戌 <i>wu-xu</i>	36. 己亥 <i>ji-hai</i>
37. 庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	38. 辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	39. 壬寅 <i>ren-yin</i>	40. 癸卯 <i>gui-mao</i>
41. 甲辰 <i>jia-chen</i>	42. 乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	43. 丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	44. 丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>
45. 戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	46. 己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	47. 庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	48. 辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>
49. 壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	50. 癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	51. 甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	52. 乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>
53. 丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	54. 丁巳 <i>ding-si</i>	55. 戊午 <i>wu-wu</i>	56. 己未 <i>ji-wei</i>
57. 庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	58. 辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	59. 壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	60. 癸亥 <i>gui-hai</i>

五帝 Five August Emperors

(约前 30 世纪初—约前 21 世纪初)

(c. 30th century B.C.–c. 21st century B.C.)

黄帝 Yellow Emperor			
颛顼 [zhuānxū] Emperor Zhuanxu			
帝喾 [kù] Emperor Ku			
尧 [yáo] Emperor Yao			
舜 [shùn] Emperor Shun			

夏 Xia Dynasty
(约前 2070–前 1600) (c. 2070 B.C.–1600 B.C.)

禹 [yǔ] King Yu			
启 King Qi			
太康 King Taikang			
仲康 King Zhongkang			
相 King Xiang			
少康 King Shaokang			
予 King Yu			
槐 King Huai			
芒 King Mang			
泄 King Xie			
不降 King Bujiang			
扃 [jiōng] King Jiong			
廛 [jīn] King Jin			
孔甲 King Kongjia			
皋 [gāo] King Gao			
发 King Fa			
癸 [guǐ] (桀 [jié]) King Gui (or King Jie)			

商 Shang Dynasty**(前 1600–前 1046) (1600 B.C.–1046 B.C.)****商前期 (前 1600–前 1300) Early Shang Dynasty (1600 B.C.–1300 B.C.)**

汤 King Tang			
太丁 King Taiding			
外丙 King Waibing			
中壬 King Zhongren			
太甲 King Taijia			
沃丁 King Woding			
太庚 King Taigeng			
小甲 King Xiaojia			
雍己 King Yongji			
太戊 King Taiwu			
中丁 King Zhongding			
外壬 King Wairen			
河亶 [dǎn] 甲 King Hedan Jia			
祖乙 King Zuyi			
祖辛 King Zuxin			
沃甲 King Wojia			
祖丁 King Zuding			
南庚 King Nangeng			
阳甲 King Yangjia			
盘庚 (迁殷前) King Pangeng (before the Shang capital was moved to Yin)			

商后期 (前 1300–前 1046) Later Shang Dynasty (1300 B.C.–1046 B.C.)

盘庚 (迁殷后) * King Pangeng (after the Shang capital was moved to Yin)			
小辛 King Xiaoxin	(50)		前 1300
小乙 King Xiaoyi			
武丁 King Wuding	(59)		前 1250
祖庚 King Zugeng			
祖甲 King Zujia			
廩辛 King Linxin	(44)		前 1191
康丁 King Kangding			
武乙 King Wuyi	(35)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	前 1147
文丁 King Wending	(11)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	前 1112
帝乙 King Diyi	(26)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	前 1101
帝辛 (纣) King Dixin (or King Zhou)	(30)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	前 1075

*盘庚迁都于殷后, 商也称殷。

Shang was also called Yin, after King Pangeng moved the Shang capital to Yin.

周 Zhou Dynasty

(前 1046–前 256) (1046 B.C.–256 B.C.)

西周 (前 1046–前 771) Western Zhou Dynasty (1046 B.C.–771 B.C.)

武王 King Wu (姬 [jī] 发 Ji Fa)	(4)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	前 1046
成王 King Cheng (～诵 Ji Song)	(22)	己亥 <i>ji-hai</i>	前 1042
康王 King Kang (～钊 [zhāo] Ji Zhao)	(25)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	前 1020
昭王 King Zhao (～瑕 [xiá] Ji Xia)	(19)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	前 995
穆王 King Mu (～满 Ji Man)	(55) 共王当年改元 King Gong changed the reign title in the same year.	丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	前 976
共 [gōng] 王 King Gong (～翳 [yī] 扈 Ji Yihu)	(23)	己亥 <i>ji-hai</i>	前 922
懿 [yì] 王 King Yi (～躋 [jiān] Ji Jian)	(8)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	前 899
孝王 King Xiao (～辟方 Ji Pifang)	(6)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	前 891
夷王 King Yi (～嬖 [xiè] Ji Xie)	(8)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	前 885
厉王 King Li (～胡 Ji Hu)	(37) 共和当年改元 In the beginning of the Gonghe reign the reign title was changed.	甲申 <i>jia-shen</i>	前 877
共和 Gonghe reign	(14)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	前 841
宣王 King Xuan (～静 Ji Jing)	(46)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	前 827
幽王 King You (～宫涅 [shēng] Ji Gongsheng)	(11)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	前 781

东周 (前 770–前 256) Eastern Zhou Dynasty (770 B.C.–256 B.C.)

公元前 770 年至公元前 476 年, 为春秋时代; 公元前 475 年至公元前 221 年, 为战国时代, 主要有秦、魏、韩、赵、楚、燕、齐等国。

The Spring and Autumn Period lasted from 770 BC to 476 BC; the Warring States Period lasted from 475 BC to 221 BC, the main states being Qin, Wei, Han, Zhao, Chu, Yan, and Qi.

平王 King Ping (姬宜臼 Ji Yijiu)	(51)	辛未 <i>xin-wei</i>	前 770
桓王 King Huan (～林 Ji Lin)	(23)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	前 719
庄王 King Zhuang (～佗 [tuó] Ji Tuo)	(15)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	前 696
釐 [xī] 王 King Xi (～胡齐 Ji Huqi)	(5)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	前 681
惠王 King Hui (～闾 [làng] Ji Lang)	(25)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	前 676
襄 [xiāng] 王 King Xiang (～郑 Ji Zheng)	(33)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	前 651
顷王 King Qing (～壬臣 Ji Renchen)	(6)	癸卯 <i>gui-mao</i>	前 618
匡王 King Kuang (～班 Ji Ban)	(6)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	前 612
定王 King Ding (～瑜 [yú] Ji Yu)	(21)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	前 606
简王 King Jian (～夷 Ji Yi)	(14)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	前 585
灵王 King Ling (～泄心 Ji Xiexin)	(27)	庚寅 <i>geng-yin</i>	前 571
景王 King Jing (～贵 Ji Gui)	(25)	丁巳 <i>ding-si</i>	前 544
悼王 King Dao (～猛 Ji Meng)	(1)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	前 520
敬王 King Jing (～匄 [gài] Ji Gai)	(44)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	前 519
元王 King Yuan (～仁 Ji Ren)	(7)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	前 475
贞定王 King Zhending (～介 Ji Jie)	(28)	癸酉 <i>gui-you</i>	前 468
哀王 King Ai (～去疾 Ji Quji)	(1)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	前 441

思王 King Si (~ 叔 Ji Shu)	(1)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	前 441
考王 King Kao (~ 嵬 [wéi] Ji Wei)	(15)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	前 440
威烈王 King Weilie (~ 午 Ji Wu)	(24)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	前 425
安王 King An (~ 骄 Ji Jiao)	(26)	庚辰 <i>geng-chen</i>	前 401
烈王 King Lie (~ 喜 Ji Xi)	(7)	丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	前 375
显王 King Xian (~ 扁 Ji Bian)	(48)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	前 368
慎靓 [jing] 王 King Shenjing (~ 定 Ji Ding)	(6)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	前 320
赧 [nǎn] 王 King Nan (~ 延 Ji Yan)	(59)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i> 前 314	前 314

秦 Qin Dynasty

[秦帝国 (前 221–前 206) Qin Empire (221 B.C.–206 B.C.)]

周赧王 59 年乙巳 (前256), 秦灭周。自次年 (秦昭襄王 52 年丙午, 前255) 起至秦王政25年己卯 (前222), 史家以秦王纪年。秦王政 26 年庚辰 (前221) 完成统一, 称始皇帝。

In 256 B.C., or the 59th year of the reign of King Nan, the Eastern Zhou was overthrown by the State of Qin. Historians chronicle the events taking place during the period from 255 B.C., or the 52nd year of the reign of King Zhaoxiang of Qin, to 222 B.C., or the 25th year of the reign of King Ying Zheng of Qin, along the lineage of the kings of Qin. Ying Zheng accomplished the unification of China in 221 B.C. or the 26th year of his reign, and proclaimed himself the First Emperor.

昭襄王 King Zhaoxiang (嬴则, 又名稷 Ying Ze, also named Ji)	(56)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	前 306
孝文王 King Xiaowen (~ 柱 Ying Zhu)	(1)	辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>	前 250
庄襄王 King Zhuangxiang (~ 子楚 Ying Zichu)	(3)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	前 249

始皇帝 First Emperor (～政 Ying Zheng)	(37)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	前 246
二世皇帝 Second Emperor (～胡亥 Ying Huhai)	(3)	壬辰 <i>ren-chen</i>	前 209

汉 Han Dynasty

(前 206—公元 220) (206 B.C.–A.D. 220)

西汉 (前 206—公元 25) Western Han Dynasty (206 B.C.–A.D. 25)

包括王莽 (公元 9—23) 和更始帝 (23—25)。 Wang Mang (9—23) and Emperor Gengshi (23—25) included. (Translator's Note: Starting with the First Emperor of the Qin Dynasty, Chinese monarchs are all called emperors.)

高帝 Emperor Gao (刘邦 Liu Bang)	(12)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	前 206
惠帝 Emperor Hui (～盈 Liu Ying)	(7)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	前 194
高后 Empress Gao (吕雉 Lǚ Zhì)	(8)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	前 187
文帝 Emperor Wen (刘恒 Liu Heng)	(16)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	前 179
景帝 Emperor Jing (～启 Liu Qi)	(后元 Houyuan) (7)	戊寅 <i>wu-yin</i>	前 163
	(7)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	前 156
	(中元 Zhongyuan) (6)	壬辰 <i>ren-chen</i>	前 149
	(后元 Houyuan) (3)	戊戌 <i>wu-xu</i>	前 143
武帝 Emperor Wu (～彻 Liu Che)	建元 Jianyuan (6)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	前 140
	元光 Yuanguang (6)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	前 134

	元朔 Yuanshuo (6)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	前 128
	元狩 Yuanshou (6)	己未 <i>ji-wei</i>	前 122
	元鼎 Yuanding (6)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	前 116
	元封 Yuanfeng (6)	辛未 <i>xin-wei</i>	前 110
	太初 Taichu (4)	丁丑 <i>ding-chou</i>	前 104
	天汉 Tianhan (4)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	前 100
	太始 Taishi (4)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	前 96
	征和 Zhenghe (4)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	前 92
	后元 Houyuan (2)	癸巳 <i>gui-si</i>	前 88
昭帝 Emperor Zhao (～ 弗陵 Liu Fuling)	始元 Shiyuan (7)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	前 86
	元凤 Yuanfeng (6)	辛丑 _八 <i>xin-chou₈</i>	前 80
	元平 Yuanping (1)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	前 74
宣帝 Emperor Xuan (～ 询 Liu Xun)	本始 Benshi (4)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	前 73
	地节 Dijie (4)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	前 69
	元康 Yuankang (5)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	前 65
	神爵 Shenjue (4)	庚申 _三 <i>geng-shen₃</i>	前 61
	五凤 Wufeng (4)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	前 57
	甘露 Ganlu (4)	戊辰 <i>wu-chen</i>	前 53
	黄龙 Huanglong (1)	壬申 <i>ren-shen</i>	前 49
元帝 Emperor Yuan (～ 奭 [shi] Liu Shi)	初元 Chuyuan (5)	癸酉 <i>gui-you</i>	前 48
	永光 Yongguang (5)	戊寅 <i>wu-yin</i>	前 43
	建昭 Jianzhao (5)	癸未 <i>gui-wei</i>	前 38
	竟宁 Jingning (1)	戊子 <i>wu-zi</i>	前 33

成帝 Emperor Cheng (~ 骜 [ào] Liu Ao)	建始 Jianshi (4)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	前 32
	河平 Heping (4)	癸巳 $\equiv$ <i>gui-si₃</i>	前 28
	阳朔 Yangshuo (4)	丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	前 24
	鸿嘉 Hongjia (4)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	前 20
	永始 Yongshi (4)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	前 16
	元延 Yuanyan (4)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	前 12
	绥和 Suihe (2)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	前 8
	河平 Heping (4)	癸巳 $\equiv$ <i>gui-si₃</i>	前 28
	阳朔 Yangshuo (4)	丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	前 24
	鸿嘉 Hongjia (4)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	前 20
	永始 Yongshi (4)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	前 16
	元延 Yuanyan (4)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	前 12
	绥和 Suihe (2)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	前 8
哀帝 Emperor Ai (刘欣 Liu Xin)	建平 Jianping (4)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	前 6
	元寿 Yuanshou (2)	己未 <i>ji-wei</i>	前 2
平帝 Emperor Ping (~ 衍 [kàn] Liu Kan)	元始 Yuanshi (5)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	公元 1
孺子婴 Ruzi Ying (王莽摄政 with Wang Mang as regent)	居摄 Jushe (3)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	6
	初始 Chushi (1)	戊辰 $\perp$ — <i>wu-chen₁₁</i>	8
[新 Xin (New) Dynasty] 王莽 Wang Mang	始建国 Shijianguo (5)	己巳 <i>ji-si</i>	9
	天凤 Tianfeng (6)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	14
	地皇 Dihuang (4)	庚辰 <i>geng-chen</i>	20
更始帝 Emperor Gengshi (刘玄 Liu Xuan)	更始 Gengshi (3)	癸未 $\equiv$ <i>gui-wei₂</i>	23

译者按: 孺子婴即刘婴, 孺子为其号。元始5年被王莽立为太子, 时年两岁。
Translator's Note: Ruzi Ying is the literary name of Liu Ying, who was two years old when Wang Mang installed him as the crown prince in the 5th year of the Yuanshi reign.

东汉 Eastern Han Dynasty (25–220)

光武帝 Emperor Guangwu (刘秀 Liu Xiu)	建武 Jianwu (32)	乙酉 _六 <i>yi-you₆</i>	25
	建武中元 Jianwu Zhongyuan (2)	丙辰 _四 <i>bing-chen₄</i>	56
明帝 Emperor Ming (～庄 Liu Zhuang)	永平 Yongping (18)	戊午 <i>wu-wu</i>	58
章帝 Emperor Zhang (～烜 [dá] Liu Da)	建初 Jianchu (9)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	76
	元和 Yuanhe (4)	甲申 _八 <i>jia-shen₈</i>	84
	章和 Zhanghe (2)	丁亥 _七 <i>ding-hai₇</i>	87
和帝 Emperor He (～肇 [zhào] Liu Zhao)	永元 Yongyuan (17)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	89
	元兴 Yuanxing (1)	乙巳 _四 <i>yi-si₄</i>	105
殇 [shāng] 帝 Emperor Shang (～隆 Liu Long)	延平 Yanping (1)	丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	106
安帝 Emperor An (～祐 [hù] Liu Hu)	永初 Yongchu (7)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	107
	元初 Yuanchu (7)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	114
	永宁 Yongning (2)	庚申 _四 <i>geng-shen₄</i>	120
	建光 Jianguang (2)	辛酉 _七 <i>xin-you₇</i>	121
	延光 Yanguang (4)	壬戌 _三 <i>ren-xu₃</i>	122
顺帝 Emperor Shun (～保 Liu Bao)	永建 Yongjian (7)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	126
	阳嘉 Yangjia (4)	壬申 _三 <i>ren-shen₃</i>	132
	永和 Yonghe (6)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	136
	汉安 Han'an (3)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	142
	建康 Jiankang (1)	甲申 _四 <i>jia-shen₄</i>	144
冲帝 Emperor Chong (～炳 [bǐng] Liu Bing)	永熹 [xī] Yongxi (嘉 Jia) (1)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	145

质帝 Emperor Zhi (~ 缢 [zuǎn] Liu Zuan)	本初 Benchu (1)	丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	146
桓帝 Emperor Huan (~ 志 Liu Zhi)	建和 Jianhe (3)	丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>	147
	和平 Heping (1)	庚寅 <i>geng-yin</i>	150
	元嘉 Yuanjia (3)	辛卯 <i>xin-mao</i>	151
	永兴 Yongxing (2)	癸巳 _五 <i>gui-si₅</i>	153
	永寿 Yongshou (4)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	155
	延熹 [xī]Yanxi (10)	戊戌 _六 <i>wu-xu₆</i>	158
	永康 Yongkang (1)	丁未 _六 <i>ding-wei₆</i>	167
灵帝 Emperor Ling (~ 宏 Liu Hong)	建宁 Jianning (5)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	168
	熹 [xī] 平 Xiping (7)	壬子 _五 <i>ren-zi₅</i>	172
	光和 Guanghe (7)	戊午 _三 <i>wu-wu₃</i>	178
	中平 Zhongping (6)	甲子 _{十二} <i>jia-zi₁₂</i>	184
献帝 Emperor Xian (~ 协 Liu Xie)	初平 Chuping (4)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	190
	兴平 Xingping (2)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	194
	建安 Jian'an (25)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	196
	延康 Yankang (1)	庚子 _三 <i>geng-zi₃</i>	220

三国 Three Kingdoms (220–280)

魏 Kingdom of Wei (220–265)

文帝 Emperor Wen (曹丕 [pī] Cao Pi)	黄初 Huangchu (7)	庚子 + <i>geng-zi</i> ₁₀	220
明帝 Emperor Ming (～叡 [ruì] Cao Rui)	太和 Taihe (7)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i> 癸	227
	青龙 Qinglong (5)	丑 _二 <i>gui-chou</i> ₂	233
	景初 Jingchu (3)	丁巳 _三 <i>ding-si</i> ₃	237
齐王 King Qi (～芳 Cao Fang)	正始 Zhengshi (10)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	240
	嘉平 Jiaping (6)	己巳 _四 <i>ji-si</i> ₄	249
高贵乡公 Township Duke Gaogui (～髦 [máo] Cao Mao)	正元 Zhengyuan (3)	甲戌 _十 <i>jia-xu</i> ₁₀	254
	甘露 Ganlu (5)	丙子 _六 <i>bing-zi</i> ₆	256
元帝 Emperor Yuan (～奂 [huàn] Cao Huan) (陈留王 also called King Chenliu)	景元 Jingyuan (5)	庚辰 _六 <i>geng-chen</i> ₆	260
	咸熙 Xianxi (2)	甲申 _五 <i>jia-shen</i> ₅	264

蜀汉 Kingdom of Shuhan (221–263)

昭烈帝 Emperor Zhaolie (刘备 Liu Bei)	章武 Zhangwu (3)	辛丑 _四 <i>xin-chou</i> ₄	221
后主 Later Master (～禅 [shàn] Liu Shan)	建兴 Jianxing (15)	癸卯 _五 <i>gui-mao</i> ₅	223
	延熙 Yanxi (20)	戊午 <i>wu-wu</i>	238
	景耀 Jingyao (6)	戊寅 <i>wu-yin</i>	258
	炎兴 Yanxing (1)	癸未 _八 <i>gui-wei</i> ₈	263

吴 Kingdom of Wu (222–280)

大帝 Great Emperor (孙权 Sun Quan)	黄武 Huangwu (8)	壬寅 ₊ <i>ren-yin</i> ₁₀	222
	黄龙 Huanglong (3)	己酉 _四 <i>ji-you</i> ₄	229
	嘉禾 Jiahe (7)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	232
	赤乌 Chiwu (14)	戊午 _九 <i>wu-wu</i> ₉	238
	太元 Taiyuan (2)	辛未 _五 <i>xin-wei</i> ₅	251
	神凤 Shenfeng (1)	壬申 _二 <i>ren-shen</i> ₂	252
会稽王 King Kuaiji (~ 亮 Sun Liang)	建兴 Jianxing (2)	壬申 _四 <i>ren-shen</i> ₄	252
	五凤 Wufeng (3)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	254
	太平 Taiping (3)	丙子 ₊ <i>bing-zi</i> ₁₀	256
景帝 Emperor Jing (~ 休 Sun Xiu)	永安 Yong'an (7)	戊寅 ₊ <i>wu-yin</i> ₁₀	258
乌程侯 Marquis Wucheng (~ 皓 [hào] Sun Hao)	元兴 Yuanxing (2)	甲申 _七 <i>jia-shen</i> ₇	264
	甘露 Ganlu (2)	乙酉 _四 <i>yi-you</i> ₄	265
	宝鼎 Baoding (4)	丙戌 _八 <i>bing-xu</i> ₈	266
	建衡 Jianheng (3)	己丑 ₊ <i>ji-chou</i> ₁₀	269
	凤凰 Fenghuang (3)	壬辰 <i>ren-chen</i>	272
	天册 Tiance (2)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	275
	天玺 Tianxi (1)	丙申 _七 <i>bing-shen</i> ₇	276
	天纪 Tianji (4)	丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	277

晋 Jin Dynasty (265–420)

西晋 Western Jin Dynasty (265–317)

武帝 Emperor Wu (司马炎 Sima Yan)	泰始 Taishi (10)	乙酉 _{十二} <i>yi-you</i> ₁₂	265
	咸宁 Xianning (6)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	275
	太康 Taikang (10)	庚子 _四 <i>geng-zi</i> ₄	280
	太熙 Taixi (1)	庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	290
惠帝 Emperor Hui (～衷 Sima Zhong)	永熙 Yongxi (1)	庚戌 _四 <i>geng-xu</i> ₄	290
	永平 Yongping (1)	辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>	291
	元康 Yuankang (9)	辛亥 _三 <i>xin-hai</i> ₃	291
	永康 Yongkang (2)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	300
	永宁 Yongning (2)	辛酉 _四 <i>xin-you</i> ₄	301
	太安 Tai'an (2)	壬戌 _{十二} <i>ren-xu</i> ₁₂	302
	永安 Yong'an (1)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	304
	建武 Jianwu (1)	甲子 _七 <i>jia-zi</i> ₇	304
	永安 Yong'an (1)	甲子 _{十一} <i>jia-zi</i> ₁₁	304
	永兴 Yongxing (3)	甲子 _{十二} <i>jia-zi</i> ₁₂	304
	光熙 Guangxi (1)	丙寅 _六 <i>bing-yin</i> ₆	306
怀帝 Emperor Huai (～炽 [chi] Sima Chi)	永嘉 Yongjia (7)	丁卯 <i>ding-mao</i>	307
愍 [mǐn] 帝 Emperor Min (～邈 [yè] Sima Ye)	建兴 Jianxing (5)	癸酉 _四 <i>gui-you</i> ₄	313

东晋 Eastern Jin Dynasty (317–420)

东晋时期, 在我国北方和巴蜀, 先后存在过一些封建割据政权, 其中有: 汉(前赵)、成(成汉)、前凉、后赵(魏)、前燕、前秦、后燕、后秦、西秦、后凉、南凉、南燕、西凉、北凉、北燕、夏等国, 历史上叫作“十六国”。

During the Eastern Jin Dynasty, a number of feudal regimes existed in the north and southwest of the country. These include Han (Former Zhao), Cheng (Chenghan), Former Liang, Later Zhao (Wei), Former Yan, Former Qin, Later Yan, Later Qin, Western Qin, Later Liang, Southern Liang, Southern Yan, Western Liang, Northern Liang, Northern Yan, and Xia, referred to as the Sixteen States in history.

元帝 Emperor Yuan (司马睿 [ruì] Sima Rui)	建武 Jianwu (2)	丁丑 _三 <i>ding-chou₃</i>	317
	大兴 Daxing (4)	戊寅 _三 <i>wu-yin₃</i>	318
	永昌 Yongchang (2)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	322
明帝 Emperor Ming (～绍 Sima Shao)	永昌 Yongchang	壬午 _{四十一} <i>ren-wu_{leap11}</i>	322
	太宁 Taining (4)	癸未 _三 <i>gui-wei₃</i>	323
成帝 Emperor Cheng (～衍 [yǎn] Sima Yan)	太宁 Taining	乙酉 _{四八} <i>yi-you_{leap8}</i>	325
	咸和 Xianhe (9)	丙戌 _二 <i>bing-xu₂</i>	326
	咸康 Xiankang (8)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	335
康帝 Emperor Kang (～岳 Sima Yue)	建元 Jianyuan (2)	癸卯 <i>gui-mao</i>	343
穆帝 Emperor Mu (～聃 [dān] Sima Dan)	永和 Yonghe (12)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	345
	升平 Shengping (5)	丁巳 <i>ding-si</i>	357
哀帝 Emperor Ai (～丕 [pī] Sima Pi)	隆和 Longhe (2)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	362
	兴宁 Xingning (3)	癸亥 _二 <i>gui-hai₂</i>	363
海西公 Duke Haixi (～奕 [yì] Sima Yi)	太和 Taihe (6)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	366
简文帝 Emperor Jianwen (～昱 [yù] Sima Yu)	咸安 Xian'an (2)	辛未 _{十一} <i>xin-wei₁₁</i>	371
孝武帝 Emperor Xiaowu (～曜 [yào] Sima Yao)	宁康 Ningkang (3)	癸酉 <i>gui-you</i>	373
	太元 Taiyuan (21)	丙子 <i>bing-zi</i>	376

安帝 Emperor An (~ 德宗 Sima Dezong)	隆安 Long'an (5)	丁酉 <i>dīng-you</i>	397
	元兴 Yuanxing (3)	壬寅 <i>ren-yin</i>	402
	义熙 Yixi (14)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	405
恭帝 Emperor Gong (~ 德文 Sima Dewen)	元熙 Yuanxi (2)	己未 <i>ji-wei</i>	419

南北朝

Southern and Northern Dynasties (420–589)

南朝 Southern Dynasties

宋 Song Dynasty (420–479)

武帝 Emperor Wu (刘裕 Liu Yu)	永初 Yongchu (3)	庚申 _八 <i>geng-shen₆</i>	420
少帝 Emperor Shao (~ 义符 Liu Yifu)	景平 Jingping (2)	癸亥 <i>gui-hai</i>	423
文帝 Emperor Wen (~ 义隆 Liu Yilong)	元嘉 Yuanjia (30)	甲子 _八 <i>jia-zi₈</i>	424
孝武帝 Emperor Xiaowu (~ 骏 [jùn] Liu Jun)	孝建 Xiaojian (3)	甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	454
	大明 Daming (8)	丁酉 <i>dīng-you</i>	457
前废帝 Former Dethroned Emperor (~ 子业 Liu Ziyè)	永光 Yongguang (1)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	465
	景和 Jinghe (1)	乙巳 _八 <i>yi-si₈</i> 4	465
明帝 Emperor Ming (~ 彧 [yù] Liu Yu)	泰始 Taishi (7)	乙巳 _{十二} <i>yi-si₁₂</i>	465
	泰豫 Taiyu (1)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	472
后废帝 Later Dethroned Emperor (~ 昱 [yù] Liu Yu) (苍梧王 also called King Cangwu)	元徽 Yuanhui (5)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	473
顺帝 Emperor Shun (~ 準 Liu Zhun)	明 Shengming (3)	丁巳 _七 <i>dīng-si₇</i>	477

齐 Qi Dynasty (479–502)

高帝 Emperor Gao (萧道成 Xiao Daocheng)	建元 Jianyuan (4)	己未 _四 <i>ji-wei₄</i>	479
武帝 Emperor Wu (~ 赜 [zé] Xiao Ze)	永明 Yongming (11)	癸亥 <i>gui-hai</i>	483
鬱林王 King Yulin (~ 昭业 Xiao Zhaoye)	隆昌 Longchang (1)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	494
海陵王 King Hailing (~ 昭文 Xiao Zhaowen)	延兴 Yanxing (1)	甲戌 _七 <i>jia-xu₇</i>	494
明帝 King Ming (~ 鸾 Xiao Luan)	建武 Jianwu (5)	甲戌 _十 <i>jia-xu₁₀</i>	494
	永泰 Yongtai (1)	戊寅 _四 <i>wu-yin₄</i>	498
东昏侯 Marquis Donghun (~ 宝卷 Xiao Baojuan)	永元 Yongyuan (3)	己卯 <i>ji-mao</i>	499
和帝 Emperor He (~ 宝融 Xiao Baorong)	中兴 Zhongxing (2)	辛巳 _三 <i>xin-si₃</i>	501

梁 Liang Dynasty (502–557)

武帝 Emperor Wu (萧衍 [yǎn] Xiao Yan)	天监 Tianjian (18)	壬午 _四 <i>ren-wu₄</i>	502
	普通 Putong (8)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	520
	大通 Datong (3)	丁未 _三 <i>ding-wei₃</i>	527
	中大通 Mid-Da-tong (6)	己酉 _十 <i>ji-you₁₀</i>	529
	大同 Datong (12)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	535
	中大同 Mid-Da-tong (2)	丙寅 _四 <i>bing-yin₄</i>	546
	太清 Taiqing (3)*	丁卯 _四 <i>ding-mao₄</i>	547

简文帝 Emperor Jianwen (~ 纲 Xiao Gang)	大宝 Dabao (2)**	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	550
元帝 Emperor Yuan (~ 绎 [yì] Xiao Yi)	承圣 Chengsheng (4)	壬申 _{十一} <i>ren-shen₁₁</i>	552
敬帝 Emperor Jing (~ 方智 Xiao Fangzhi)	绍泰 Shaotai (2)	乙亥 _{十一} <i>yi-hai₁₀</i>	555
	太平 Taiping (2)	丙子 _九 <i>bing-zi₉</i>	556

*有的地区用至 6 年。 The reign title lasted for six years in some regions.

**有的地区用至 3 年。 The reign title lasted for three years in some regions.

陈 Chen Dynasty (557–589)

武帝 Emperor Wu (陈霸先 Chen Baxian)	永定 Yongding (3)	丁丑 _{十一} <i>ding-chou₁₀</i>	557
文帝 Emperor Wen (~ 蒨 [qiàn] Chen Qian)	天嘉 Tianjia (7)	庚辰 <i>geng-chen</i>	560
	天康 Tiankang (1)	丙戌 _二 <i>bing-xu₂</i>	566
废帝 Dethroned Emperor (~ 伯宗 Chen Bozong) (临海王 also called King Linhai)	光大 Guangda (2)	丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>	567
宣帝 Emperor Xuan (~ 顼 [xū] Chen Xu)	太建 Taijian (14)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	569
后主 Later Master (~ 叔宝) Chen Shubao	至德 Zhide (4)	癸卯 <i>gui-mao</i>	583
	祯明 Zhenming (3)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	587

北朝 Northern Dynasties

北魏 **Northern Wei Dynasty** [拓跋氏, 后改元氏 founded by the Tuoba family, which later changed its family name to Yuan] (386–534)

北魏建国于丙戌 (386 年) 正月, 初称代国, 至同年四月始改国号为魏, 439 年灭北凉, 统一北方。 The Northern Wei Dynasty was known as the State of Dai when it was established in the first month of the year *bing-xu* (386). The dynasty was renamed Wei in the 4th month of the same year. In 439 the Wei Dynasty unified northern China after it overthrew the Northern Liang State.

道武帝 Emperor Daowu (拓跋珪 [guī] Tuoba Gui)	登国 Dengguo (11)	丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	386
	皇始 Huangshi (3)	丙申 _七 <i>bing-shen₇</i>	396
	天兴 Tianxing (7)	戊戌 _{十二} <i>wu-xu₁₂</i>	398
	天赐 Tianci (6)	甲辰 _十 <i>jia-chen₁₀</i>	404
明元帝 Emperor Mingyuan (嗣 [sì] Tuoba Si)	永兴 Yongxing (5)	己酉 _十 <i>ji-you₁₀</i>	409
	神瑞 Shenrui (3)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	414
	泰常 Taichang (8)	丙辰 _四 <i>bing-chen₄</i>	416
太武帝 Emperor Taiwu (焘 [tāo] Tuoba Tao)	始光 Shiguang (5)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	424
	神䴥 [jiǎ] Shenjia (4)	戊辰 _三 <i>wu-chen₂</i>	428
	延和 Yanhe (3)	壬申 <i>ren-shen</i>	432
	太延 Taiyan (6)	乙亥 <i>yi-hai</i>	435
	太平真君 Taiping Zhenjun (12)	庚辰 _六 <i>geng-chen₆</i>	440
	正平 Zhengping (2)	辛卯 _六 <i>xin-mao₆</i>	451
南安王 King Nan'an (拓跋余 Tuoba Yu)	永(承)平 Yong (Cheng) Ping (1)	壬辰 _三 <i>ren-chen₃</i>	452
文成帝 Emperor Wencheng (浚 [jùn] Tuoba Jun)	兴安 Xing'an (3)	壬辰 _十 <i>ren-chen₁₀</i>	452
	兴光 Xingguang (2)	甲午 _七 <i>jia-wu₇</i>	454
	太安 Tai'an (5)	乙未 _六 <i>yi-wei₆</i>	455
	和平 Heping (6)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	460
献文帝 Emperor Xianwen (弘 Tuoba Hong)	天安 Tian'an (2)	丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	466
	皇兴 Huangxing (5)	丁未 _八 <i>ding-wei₈</i>	467
孝文帝 Emperor Xiaowen (元宏 Yuan Hong)	延兴 Yanxing (6)	辛亥 _八 <i>xin-hai₈</i>	471
	承明 Chengming (1)	丙辰 _六 <i>bing-chen₆</i>	476
	太和 Taihe (23)	丁巳 <i>ding-si</i>	477

宣武帝 Emperor Xuanwu (~ 恪 [kè] Yuan Ke)	景明 Jingming (4)	庚辰 <i>geng-chen</i>	500
	正始 Zhengshi (5)	甲申 <i>jia-shen</i>	504
	永平 Yongping (5)	戊子 _八 <i>wu-zi₈</i>	508
	延昌 Yanchang (4)	壬辰 _四 <i>ren-chen₄</i>	512
孝明帝 Emperor Xiaoming (~ 诩 [xǔ] Yuan Xu)	熙平 Xiping (3)	丙申 <i>bing-shen</i>	516
	神龟 Shengui (3)	戊戌 _二 <i>wu-xu₂</i>	518
	正光 Zhengguang (6)	庚子 _七 <i>geng-zi₇</i>	520
	孝昌 Xiaochang (3)	乙巳 _六 <i>yi-si₆</i>	525
	武泰 Wutai (1)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	528
孝庄帝 Emperor Xiaozhuang (~ 子攸 [yōu] Yuan Ziyou)	建义 Jianyi (1)	戊申 _四 <i>wu-shen₄</i>	528
	永安 Yong'an (3)	戊申 _九 <i>wu-shen₉</i>	528
长广王 King Changguang (~ 晔 [yè] Yuan Ye)	建明 Jianming (2)	庚戌 _十 <i>geng-xu₁₀</i>	530
节闵 [m ĭ n] 帝 Emperor Jiemin (~ 恭 Yuan Gong)	普泰 Putai (2)	辛亥 _二 <i>xin-hai₂</i>	531
安定王 King Anding (~ 朗 Yuan Lang)	中兴 Zhongxing (2)	辛亥 _十 <i>xin-hai₁₀</i>	531
孝武帝 Emperor Xiaowu (~ 脩 Yuan Xiu)	太昌 Taichang (1)	壬子 _四 <i>ren-zi₄</i>	532
	永兴 Yongxing (1)	壬子 _四 <i>ren-zi₄</i>	532
	永熙 Yongxi (3)	壬子 _四 <i>ren-zi₄</i>	532

东魏 Eastern Wei Dynasty (534–550)

孝静帝 Emperor Xiaojing (元善见 Yuan Shanjian)	天平 Tianping (4)	甲寅 _{十 jia-yin₁₀}	534
	元象 Yuanxiang (2)	戊午 _{wu-wu}	538
	兴和 Xinghe (4)	己未 _{十一 ji-wei₁₁}	539
	武定 Wuding (8)	癸亥 _{gui-hai}	543

北齐 Northern Qi Dynasty (550–577)

文宣帝 Emperor Wenxuan (高洋 Gao Yang)	天保 Tianbao (10)	庚午 _{五 geng-wu₅}	550
废帝 Dethroned Emperor (～殷 Gao Yin)	乾明 Qianming (1)	庚辰 _{geng-chen}	560
孝昭帝 Emperor Xiaozhao (～演 Gao Yan)	皇建 Huangjian (2)	庚辰 _{八 geng-chen₈}	560
武成帝 Emperor Wucheng (～湛 Gao Zhan)	太宁 Taining (2)	辛巳 _{十一 xin-si₁₁}	561
	河清 Heqing (4)	壬午 _{四 ren-wu₄}	562
后主 Later Master (～纬 Gao Wei)	天统 Tiantong (5)	乙酉 _{四 yi-you₄}	565
	武平 Wuping (7)	庚寅 _{geng-yin}	570
	隆化 Longhua (1)	丙申 _{十二 bing-shen₁₂}	576
幼主 Young Master (～恒 Gao Heng)	承光 Chengguang (1)	丁酉 _{ding-you}	577

西魏 Western Wei Dynasty (535–556)

文帝 Emperor Wen (元宝炬 Yuan Baoju)	大统 Datong (17)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	535
废帝 Dethroned Emperor (～钦 Yuan Qin)	— (3)	壬申 <i>ren-shen</i>	552
恭帝 Emperor Gong (～廓 Yuan Kuo)	— (3)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu₁</i>	554

北周 Northern Zhou Dynasty (557–581)

孝闵 [mǐn] 帝 Emperor Xiaomin (宇文觉 Yuwen Jue)	— (1)	丁丑 <i>ding-chou</i>	557
明帝 Emperor Ming (～毓 [yù] Yuwen Yu)	— (3)	丁丑 _九 <i>ding-chou₉</i>	557
	武成 Wucheng (2)	己卯 _八 <i>ji-mao₈</i>	559
武帝 Emperor Wu (～邕 [yōng] Yuwen Yong)	保定 Baoding (5)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	561
	天和 Tianhe (7)	丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	566
	建德 Jiande (7)	壬辰 _三 <i>ren-chen₃</i>	572
	宣政 Xuanzheng (1)	戊戌 _三 <i>wu-xu₃</i>	578
宣帝 Emperor Xuan (～赞 [yūn] Yuwen Yun)	大成 Dacheng (1)	己亥 <i>ji-hai</i>	579
静帝 Emperor Jing (～阐 [chǎn] Yuwen Chan)	大象 Daxiang (3)	己亥 _二 <i>ji-hai₂</i>	579
	大定 Dading (1)	辛丑 _一 <i>xin-chou₁</i>	581

隋 Sui Dynasty (581–618)

隋建国于 581 年, 589 年灭陈, 完成统一。 The Sui Dynasty was established in 581 and reunited China in 589 after it overthrew the Chen Dynasty.

文帝 Emperor Wen (杨坚 Yang Jian)	开皇 Kaihuang (20)	辛丑 _二 <i>xin-chou₂</i>	581
	仁寿 Renshou (4)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	601
炀 [yáng] 帝 Emperor Yang (~ 广 Yang Guang)	大业 Daye (14)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	605
恭帝 Emperor Gong (~ 侑 [yòu] Yang You)	义宁 Yining (2)	丁丑 _{十一} <i>ding-chou₁₁</i>	617

唐 Tang Dynasty (618–907)

高祖 Emperor Gaozu (李渊 Li Yuan)	武德 Wude (9)	戊寅 _五 <i>wu-yin₅</i>	618
太宗 Emperor Taizong (~ 世民 Li Shimin)	贞观 Zhenguan (23)	丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>	627
高宗 Emperor Gaozong (~ 治 Li Zhi)	永徽 Yonghui (6)	庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	650
	显庆 Xianqing (6)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	656
	龙朔 Longshuo (3)	辛酉 _三 <i>xin-you₃</i> *	661
	麟德 Linde (2)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	664
	乾封 Qianfeng (3)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	666
	总章 Zongzhang (3)	戊辰 _三 <i>wu-chen₃</i>	668
	咸亨 Xianheng (5)	庚午 _三 <i>geng-wu₃</i>	670
	上元 Shangyuan (3)	甲戌 _八 <i>jia-xu₈</i>	674
	仪凤 Yifeng (4)	丙子 _{十一} <i>bing-zi₁₁</i>	676
	调露 Tiaolu (2)	己卯 _六 <i>ji-mao₆</i>	679
	永隆 Yonglong (2)	庚辰 _八 <i>geng-chen₈</i>	680
	开耀 Kaiyao (2)	辛巳 _九 <i>xin-si₉</i>	681
	永淳 Yongchun (2)	壬午 _二 <i>ren-wu₂</i>	682
	弘道 Hongdao (1)	癸未 _{十二} <i>gui-wei₁₂</i>	683

中宗 Emperor Zhongzong (~显又名哲 Li Xian, also named Li Zhe)	嗣圣 Sisheng (1)	甲申 <i>jia-shen</i>	684
睿 [rui] 宗 Emperor Ruizong (~旦 Li Dan)	文明 Wenming (1)	甲申 _二 <i>jia-shen₂</i>	684
武后 Empress Wu (武曌 [zhào] Wu Zhao)	光宅 Guangzhai (1)	甲申 _九 <i>jia-shen₉</i>	684
	垂拱 Chuigong (4)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	685
	永昌 Yongchang (1)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	689
	载初 Zaichu** (1)	庚寅 _正 <i>geng-yin₁</i>	690
武后称帝，改国号为周。Empress Wu ascended the throne and changed the name of the dynasty to Zhou.	天授 Tianshou (3)	庚寅 _九 <i>geng-yin₉</i>	690
	如意 Ruyi (1)	壬辰 _四 <i>ren-chen₄</i>	692
	长寿 Changshou (3)	壬辰 _九 <i>ren-chen₉</i>	692
	延载 Yanzai (1)	甲午 _五 <i>jia-wu₅</i>	694
	证圣 Zhengsheng (1)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	695
	天册万岁 Tiance Wansui (2)	乙未 _九 <i>yi-wei₉</i>	695
	万岁登封 Wansui Dengfeng (1)	丙申 _腊 <i>bing-shen₁₂</i>	696
	万岁通天 Wansui Tongtian (2)	丙申 _三 <i>bing-shen₃</i>	696
	神功 Shengong (1)	丁酉 _九 <i>ding-you₉</i>	697
	圣历 Shengli (3)	戊戌 <i>wu-xu</i>	698
	久视 Jiushi (1)	庚子 _五 <i>geng-zi₅</i>	700
	大足 Dazu (1)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	701
	长安 Chang'an (4)	辛丑 _十 <i>xin-chou₁₀</i>	701
	神龙 Shenlong (3)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	705
中宗 (李显又名哲)，复唐国号。Emperor Zhongzong (Li Xian, also named Li Zhe) changed the name of	景龙 Jinglong (4)	丁未 _九 <i>ding-wei₉</i>	707

the dynasty back to Tang.			
睿 [rui] 宗 Emperor Ruizong (~ 旦 Li Dan)	景云 Jingyun (2)	庚戌 _七 <i>geng-xu₇</i>	710
	太极 Taiji (1)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	712
	延和 Yanhe (1)	壬子 _五 <i>ren-zi₅</i>	712
玄宗 Emperor Xuanzong (~ 隆基 Li Longji)	先天 Xiantian (2)	壬子 _八 <i>ren-zi₈</i>	712
	开元 Kaiyuan (29)	癸丑 _{十二} <i>gui-chou₁₂</i>	713
	天宝 Tianbao (15)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	742
肃宗 Emperor Suzong (~ 亨 Li Heng)	至德 Zhide (3)	丙申 _七 <i>bing-shen₇</i>	756
	乾元 Qianyuan (3)	戊戌 _二 <i>wu-xu₂</i>	758
	上元 Shangyuan (2)	庚子 _四 <i>geng-zi_{1 leap4}</i>	760
	— (1)***	辛丑 _九 <i>xin-chou₉</i>	761
代宗 Emperor Daizong (~ 豫 Li Yu)	宝应 Baoying (2)	壬寅 _四 <i>ren-yin₄</i>	762
	广德 Guangde (2)	癸卯 _七 <i>gui-mao₇</i>	763
	永泰 Yongtai (2)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	765
	大历 Dali (14)	丙午 _{十一} <i>bing-wu₁₁</i>	766
德宗 Emperor Dezong (~ 适 [kuò] Li Kuo)	建中 Jianzhong (4)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	780
	兴元 Xingyuan (1)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	784
	贞元 Zhenyuan (21)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	785
顺宗 Emperor Shunzong (~ 诵 Li Song)	永贞 Yongzhen (1)	乙酉 _八 <i>yi-you₈</i>	805
宪宗 Emperor Xianzong (~ 纯 Li Chun)	元和 Yuanhe (15)	丙戌 <i>bing-xu</i>	806
穆宗 Emperor Muzong (~ 恒 Li Heng)	长庆 Changqing (4)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	821

敬宗 Emperor Jingzong (~ 湛 Li Zhan)	宝历 Baoli (3)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	825
文宗 Emperor Wenzong (~ 昂 Li Ang)	宝历 Baoli	丙午 _{十二} <i>bing-wu₁₂</i>	826
	大 (太) 和 Dahe/ Taihe (9)	丁未 _二 <i>ding-wei₂</i>	827
	开成 Kaicheng (5)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	836
武宗 Emperor Wuzong (~ 炎 Li Yan)	会昌 Huichang (6)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	841
宣宗 Emperor Xuanzong (~ 忱 [chén] Li Chen)	大中 Dazhong (14)	丁卯 <i>ding-mao</i>	847
懿 [yì] 宗 Emperor Yizong (~ 崔 [cuī] Li Cui)	大中 Dazhong	己卯 _八 <i>ji-mao₈</i>	859
	咸通 Xiantong (15)	庚辰 _{十一} <i>geng-chen₁₁</i>	860
僖 [xī] 宗 Emperor Xizong (~ 僖 [xuān] Li Xuan)	咸通 Xiantong	癸巳 _七 <i>gui-si₇</i>	873
	乾符 Qianfu (6)	甲午 _{十一} <i>jia-wu₁₁</i>	874
	广明 Guangming (2)	庚子 <i>geng-zi</i>	880
	中和 Zhonghe (5)	辛丑 _七 <i>xin-chou₇</i>	881
	光启 Guangqi (4)	乙巳 _三 <i>yi-si₃</i>	885
	文德 Wende (1)	戊申 _二 <i>wu-shen₂</i>	888
昭宗 Emperor Zhaozong (~ 晔 [yè] Li Ye)	龙纪 Longji (1)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	889
	大顺 Dashun (2)	庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	890
	景福 Jingfu (2)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	892
	乾宁 Qianning (5)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	894
	光化 Guanghua (4)	戊午 _八 <i>wu-wu₈</i>	898
	天复 Tianfu (4)	辛酉 _四 <i>xin-you₄</i>	901
	天祐 Tianyou (4)	甲子 _{闰四} <i>jia-zi_{1 leap 4}</i>	904
哀帝 Emperor Ai (~ 柩 [chù] Li Chu)	天祐 Tianyou****	甲子 _八 <i>jia-zi₈</i>	904

*辛酉三月丙申朔改元, 一作辛酉二月乙未晦改元。 The reign title was changed on the 1st day of the 3rd month of the year *xin-you*, but another theory dates it to the last day of the 2nd month of that year.

**始用周正, 改永昌元年十一月为载初元年正月, 以十二月为腊月, 夏正月为一月。 久视元年十月复用夏正, 以正月为十一月, 腊月为十二月, 一月为正月。 本表在这段期间内干支后面所注的改元月份都是周历, 各年号的使用年数也是按照周历的计算方法。 During this year Empress Wu adopted the Zhou calendar, according to which she instituted the 11th lunar month of the 1st year of the Yongchang reign (which used the Xia calendar) as the 1st month of the 1st year of her Zaichu reign, the 12th lunar month as the last month of the year, and the 1st lunar month of the Xia calendar as the 1st month of the year. In the 10th month of the 1st year of the Jiushi reign, she restored the Xia calendar, altering the 1st month of the Zhou calendar as the 11th month, the last month of the Zhou calendar as the 12th month, and the first month of the Zhou calendar as the 1st month. In this table, the month in which a reign title was changed during this period, as indicated behind the year rendered in Heavenly Stems and Earthly Branches pairings, is calculated according to the Zhou calendar, so are the years a reign lasted. (Translator's Note: In ancient times the traditional Chinese calendar fell into three categories: the Xia calendar, which regards the 1st lunar month as the beginning of the year and is the same as the lunar calendar; the Shang calendar, with the 12th lunar month as the beginning of the year; and the Zhou calendar, with the 11th lunar month as the beginning of the year.)

***此年九月以后去年号, 但称元年。 The reign title was abolished in the 9th month of this year, which was incorporated as the 1st year of the Baoying reign.

****袁帝即位未改元。 Emperor Ai did not change the reign title when he ascended the throne.

五代 Five Dynasties (907–960)

五代时期, 除后梁、后唐、后晋、后汉、后周外, 还先后存在过一些封建割据政权, 其中有: 吴、前蜀、吴越、楚、闽、南汉、荆南(南平)、后蜀、南唐、北汉等国, 历史上叫作“十国”。 During the Five Dynasties, a number of feudal regimes co-existed with Later Liang, Later Tang, Later Jin, Later Han, and Later Zhou. These include Wu, Former Shu, Wuyue, Chu, Min, Southern Han, Jingnan (Nanping), Later Shu, Southern Tang, and Northern Han, referred to as the Ten States in history.

后梁 Later Liang Dynasty (907–923)

太祖 Emperor Taizu (朱晃, 又名温、全忠 Zhu Huang, also named Wen or Quanzhong)	开平 Kaiping (5)	丁卯 _四 <i>dīng-mao₄</i>	907
	乾化 Qianhua (5)	辛未 _五 <i>xīn-wei₅</i>	911
末帝 Last Emperor (～瑱 [zhèn] Zhu Zhen)	乾化 Qianhua	癸酉 _二 <i>guī-you₂</i>	913
	贞明 Zhenming (7)	乙亥 _{十一} <i>yǐ-hai₁₁</i>	915
	龙德 Longde (3)	辛巳 _五 <i>xīn-sì₅</i>	921

后唐 Later Tang Dynasty (923–936)

庄宗 Emperor Zhuangzong (李存勖 [xù] Li Cunxu)	同光 Tongguang (4)	癸未 _四 <i>gui-wei₄</i>	923
明宗 Emperor Mingzong (亶 ~ [dǎn] Li Dan)	天成 Tiancheng (5)	丙戌 _四 <i>bing-xu₄</i>	926
	长兴 Changxing (4)	庚寅 _二 <i>geng-yin₂</i>	930
闵 [mǐn] 帝 Emperor Min (~从厚 Li Conghou)	应顺 Yingshun (1)	甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	934
末帝 Last Emperor (~从珂 [kē] Li Congke)	清泰 Qingtai (3)	甲午 _四 <i>jia-wu₄</i>	934

后晋 Later Jin Dynasty (936–947)

高祖 Emperor Gaozu (石敬瑭 [táng] Shi Jingtang)	天福 Tianfu (9)	丙申 _{十一} <i>bing-shen₁₁</i>	936
出帝 Emperor Chu (~重贵 Shi Chonggui)	天福 Tianfu*	壬寅 _六 <i>ren-yin₆</i>	942
	开运 Kaiyun (4)	甲辰 _七 <i>jia-chen₇</i>	944

*出帝即位未改元。 Emperor Chu did not change the reign title when he ascended the throne.

后汉 Later Han Dynasty (947–950)

高祖 Emperor Gaozu (刘昫 [gǎo], 本名知远 Liu Gao, originally named Liu Zhiyuan)	天福 Tianfu*	丁未 _二 <i>ding-wei₂</i>	947
	乾祐 Qianyou (3)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	948
隐帝 Emperor Yin (~承祐 Liu Chengyou)	乾祐 Qianyou**	戊申 _二 <i>wu-shen₂</i>	948

*后汉高祖即位，仍用后晋高祖年号，称天福十二年。 Emperor Gaozu of the Later Han Dynasty adopted the same reign title of Emperor Gaozu of the Later Jin Dynasty, naming the 1st year of his own reign the 12th year of Tianfu.

**隐帝即位未改元。 Emperor Yin did not change the reign title when he ascended the throne.

后周 Later Zhou Dynasty (951–960)

太祖 Emperor Taizu (郭威 Guo Wei)	广顺 Guangshun (3)	辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>	951
	显德 Xiande (7)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin₁</i>	954
世宗 Emperor Shizong (柴荣 Chai Rong)	显德 Xiande*	甲寅 <i>jia-yin₁</i>	954
恭帝 Emperor Gong (～宗训 Chai Zongxun)	显德 Xiande	己未 <i>ji-wei₆</i>	959

*世宗、恭帝都未改元。Both Emperor Shizong and Emperor Gong retained the reign title of their respective predecessors.

宋 Song Dynasty (960–1279)

北宋 Northern Song Dynasty (960–1127)

太祖 Emperor Taizu (赵匡胤 [yin] Zhao Kuangyin)	建隆 Jianlong (4)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	960
	乾德 Qiande (6)	癸亥 <i>gui-hai₁₁</i>	963
	开宝 Kaibao (9)	戊辰 <i>wu-chen₁₁</i>	968
太宗 Emperor Taizong (～炁 [jiǒng], 本名匡义, 又名光义 Zhao Jiong, originally named Zhao Kuangyi, also named Zhao Guangyi)	太平兴国 Taiping Xingguo (9)	丙子 <i>bing-zi₁₂</i>	976
	雍熙 Yongxi (4)	甲申 <i>jia-shen₁₁</i>	984
	端拱 Duangong (2)	戊子 <i>wu-zi</i>	988
	淳化 Chunhua (5)	庚寅 <i>geng-yin</i>	990
	至道 Zhidao (3)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	995
真宗 Emperor Zhenzong (～恒 Zhao Heng)	咸平 Xianping (6)	戊戌 <i>wu-xu</i>	998
	景德 Jingde (4)	戊戌 <i>wu-xu</i>	998
	大中祥符 Dazhong Xiangfu (9)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1008
	天禧 [xī] Tianxi (5)	丁巳 <i>ding-si</i>	1017
	乾兴 Qianxing (1)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	1022

仁宗 Emperor Renzong (~ 禎 Zhao Zhen)	天圣 Tiansheng (10)	癸亥 <i>gui-hai</i>	1023
	明道 Mingdao (2)	壬申 $_{+1}$ <i>ren-shen</i> ₁₁	1032
	景祐 Jingyou (5)	甲戌 <i>jia-xu</i>	1034
	宝元 Baoyuan (3)	戊寅 $_{+1}$ <i>wu-yin</i> ₁₁	1038
	康定 Kangding (2)	庚辰 $_{-2}$ <i>geng-chen</i> ₂	1040
	庆历 Qingli (8)	辛巳 $_{+1}$ <i>xin-si</i> ₁₁	1041
	皇祐 Huangyou (6)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	1049
	至和 Zhihe (3)	甲午 $_{-3}$ <i>jia-wu</i> ₃	1054
	嘉祐 Jiayou (8)	丙申 $_{-9}$ <i>bing-shen</i> ₉	1056
英宗 Emperor Yingzong (~ 曙 Zhao Shu)	治平 Zhiping (4)	甲辰 <i>jia-chen</i>	1064
神宗 Emperor Shenzong (~ 顒 [xū] Zhao Xu)	熙宁 Xining (10)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1068
	元丰 Yuanfeng (8)	戊午 <i>wu-wu</i>	1078
哲宗 Emperor Zhezong (~ 煦 [xù] Zhao Xu)	元祐 Yuanyou (9)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	1086
	绍圣 Shaosheng (5)	甲戌 $_{-4}$ <i>jia-xu</i> ₄	1094
	元符 Yuanfu (3)	戊寅 $_{-6}$ <i>wu-yin</i> ₆	1098
徽宗 Emperor Huizong (~ 佶 [jí] Zhao Ji)	建中靖国 Jianzhong Jingguo (1)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i> 1101	1101
	崇宁 Chongning (5)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	1102
	大观 Daguan (4)	丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>	1107
	政和 Zhenghe (8)	辛卯 <i>xin-mao</i>	1111
	重和 Chonghe (2)	戊戌 $_{+1}$ <i>wu-xu</i> ₁₁	1118
	宣和 Xuanhe (7)	己亥 $_{-2}$ <i>ji-hai</i> ₂	1119
钦宗 Emperor Qinzong (~ 桓 [huán] Zhao Huan)	靖康 Jingkang (2)	丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	1126

南宋 Southern Song Dynasty (1127–1279)

高宗 Emperor Gaozong (赵构 Zhao Gou)	建炎 Jianyan (4)	丁未 <i>ding-wei₅</i>	1127
	绍兴 Shaoxing (32)	辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>	1131
孝宗 Emperor Xiaozong (～昚 [shèn] Zhao Shen)	隆兴 Longxing (2)	癸未 <i>gui-wei</i>	1163
	乾道 Qiandao (9)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	1165
	淳熙 Chunxi (16)	甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	1174
光宗 Emperor Guangzong (～惇 [dūn] Zhao Dun)	绍熙 Shaoxi (5)	庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	1190
宁宗 Emperor Ningzong (～扩 Zhao Kuo)	庆元 Qingyuan (6)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	1195
	嘉泰 Jiatai (4)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	1201
	开禧 Kaixi (3)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	1205
	嘉定 Jiading (17)	戊辰 <i>wu-chen</i>	1208
理宗 Emperor Lizong (～昀 [yún] Zhao Yun)	宝庆 Baoqing (3)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	1225
	绍定 Shaoding (6)	戊子 <i>wu-zi</i>	1228
	端平 Duanping (3)	甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	1234
	嘉熙 Jiaxi (4)	丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	1237
	淳祐 Chunyou (12)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	1241
	宝祐 Baoyou (6)	癸丑 <i>gui-chou</i>	1253
	开庆 Kaiqing (1)	己未 <i>ji-wei</i>	1259
	景定 Jingding (5)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	1260
度宗 Emperor Duzong (～禔 [qí] Zhao Qi)	咸淳 Xianchun (10)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	1265
恭帝 Emperor Gong (～㮮 [xiǎn] Zhao Xian)	德祐 Deyou (2)	乙亥 <i>yi-hai</i>	1275

端宗 Emperor Duanzong (～ 晟 [shì] Zhao Shi)	景炎 Jingyan (3)	丙子 _五 <i>bing-zi₅</i>	1276
帝昺 Emperor Bing (～ 昺 [bǐng] Zhao Bing)	祥兴 Xiangxing (2)	戊寅 _五 <i>wu-yin₅</i>	1278

辽 Liao Dynasty

[耶律氏 Yelü Family] (907–1125)

辽建国于 907 年, 国号契丹, 916 年始建年号, 938 年 (一说 947 年) 改国号为辽, 983 年复称契丹, 1066 年仍称辽。The Liao Dynasty was known as the Qidan (or Khitan) Kingdom when it was first established in 907. The dynasty began to use a reign title in 916, and renamed itself Liao in 938 (or 947 according to another theory), but it resumed the name of Qidan in 983, before changing it back to Liao in 1066.

太祖 Emperor Taizu (耶律阿保机 Yelü Abaoji, or Yelü A-pao-chi)	— (10)	丁卯 <i>ding-mao</i>	907
	神册 Shence (7)	丙子 _{十二} <i>bing-zi₁₂</i>	916
	天赞 Tianzan (5)	壬午 _二 <i>ren-wu₂</i>	922
	天显 Tianxian (13)	丙戌 _二 <i>bing-xu₂</i>	926
太宗 Emperor Taizong (～ 德光 Yelü Deguang)	天显 Tianxian*	丁亥 _{十一} <i>ding-hai₁₁</i>	927
	会同 Huitong (10)	戊戌 _{十一} <i>wu-xu₁₁</i>	938
	大同 Datong (1)	丁未 _二 <i>ding-wei₂</i>	947
世宗 Emperor Shizong (～ 阮 [ruǎn] Yelü Ruan)	天禄 Tianlu (5)	丁未 _九 <i>ding-wei₉</i>	947
穆宗 Emperor Muzong (～ 璟 [jǐng] Yelü Jing)	应历 Yingli (19)	辛亥 _九 <i>xin-hai₉</i>	951
景宗 Emperor Jingzong (～ 贤 YelüXian)	保宁 Baoning (11)	己巳 _二 <i>ji-si₂</i>	969
	乾亨 Qianheng (5)	己卯 _{十一} <i>ji-mao₁₁</i>	979

圣宗 Emperor Shengzong (~ 隆绪 Yelü Longxu)	乾亨 Qianheng	壬午 _九 <i>ren-wu₉</i>	982
	统和 Tonghe (30)	癸未 _六 <i>gui-wei₆</i>	983
	开泰 Kaitai (10)	壬子 _{十一} <i>ren-zi₁₁</i>	1012
	太平 Taiping (11)	辛酉 _{十一} <i>xin-you₁₁</i>	1021
兴宗 Emperor Xingzong (~ 宗真 Yelü Zongzhen)	景福 Jingfu (2)	辛未 _六 <i>xin-wei₆</i>	1031
	重熙 Chongxi (24)	壬申 _{十一} <i>ren-shen₁₁</i>	1032
道宗 Emperor Daozong (~ 洪基 Yelü Hongji)	清宁 Qingning (10)	乙未 _八 <i>yi-wei₈</i>	1055
	咸雍 Xianyong (10)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	1065
	大 (太) 康 Dakang/ Taikang (10)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	1075
	大安 Da'an (10)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	1085
	寿昌 (隆) Shouchang/Shoulong (7)	乙亥 <i>yi-hai</i>	1095
天祚 [zuò] 帝 Emperor Tianzuo (~ 延禧 [xī] Yelü Yanxi)	乾统 Qiantong (10)	辛巳 _二 <i>xin-si₂</i>	1101
	天庆 Tianqing (10)	辛卯 <i>xin-mao</i>	1111
	保大 Baoda (5)	辛丑 <i>xin-chou</i>	1121

*太宗即位未改元。 Emperor Taizong did not change the reign title when he ascended the throne.

西夏 Western Xia (1038–1227)

1032 年 (北宋明道元年) 元昊嗣夏王位, 1034 年始建年号, 1038 年称帝, 国名大夏。在汉籍中习称西夏。1227 年为蒙古所灭。

Yuanhao inherited the throne from the king of the state of Xia in 1032 (the first year of Mingdao Reign of the Northern Song Dynasty). Yuanhao launched his first reign title in 1034 and assumed the title of emperor in 1038, calling his empire Great Xia, which is usually referred to as Western Xia in Chinese documents. Western Xia was ended by the Mongols in 1227.

景宗 (嵬名元昊) Jingzong (Weiming Yuanhao)	开运 (1) Kaiyun (1)	甲戌 jia-xu	1034
	广运 (2) Guangyun (2)	甲戌 ₊ jia-xu ₁₀	1034
	大庆 (2) Daqing (2)	丙子 _{十二} bing-zi ₁₂	1036
	天授礼法延祚 (11) Tianshou Lifa Yanzuo (11)	戊寅 ₊ wu-yin	1038
毅宗 (~ 谅祚) Yizong (Weiming Liangzuo)	延嗣宁国 (1) Yansi Ningguo (1)	己丑 ji-chou	1049
	天祐垂圣 (3) Tianyou Chuisheng (3)	庚寅 geng-yin	1050
	福圣承道 (4) Fusheng Chengdao (4)	癸巳 gui-si	1053
	都 (6) Chedu (6)	丁酉 ding-you	1057
	拱化 (5) Gonghua (5)	癸卯 gui-mao	1063

惠宗 (～秉常) Huizong (Weiming Bingchang)	乾道 (1) Qiandao (1)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1068
	天賜禮盛國慶 (5) Tianci Lisheng Guoqing (5)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	1069
	大安 (11) Daan (11)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	1074
崇宗 (～乾順) Chongzong (Weiming Qianshun)	天安禮定 (2) Tian'an Liding (2)	乙丑 <i>yi-chou</i>	1085
	天儀治平 (3) Tianyi Zhiping (3)	丁卯 <i>ding-mao</i>	1087
	天祐民安 (8) Tianyou Min' an (8)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	1090
	永安 (3) Yong' an (3)	戊寅 <i>wu-yin</i>	1098
	貞觀 (13) Zhenguan (13)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	1101
	雍寧 (5) Yongning (5)	甲午 <i>jia-wu</i>	1114
	元德 (8) Yuande (8)	己亥 <i>ji-hai</i>	1119
	正德 (8) Zhengde (8)	丁未 <i>ding-wei</i>	1127
	大德 (5) Dade (5)	乙卯 <i>yi-mao</i>	1135

仁宗 (～仁孝) Renzong (Weiming Renxiao)	大庆 (4) Daqing (4)	庚申 <i>geng-shen</i>	1140
	人庆 (5) Renqing (5)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	1144
	天盛 (21) Tiansheng (21)	己巳 <i>ji-si</i>	1149
	乾祐 (24) Qianyou (24)	庚寅 <i>geng-yin</i>	1170
桓宗 (～纯祐) Huanzong (Weiming Chunyou)	天庆 (12) Tianqing (12)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	1194
襄宗 (～安全) Xiangzong (Weiming Anquan)	应天 (4) Yingtian (4)	丙寅 _一 <i>bing-yin₁</i>	1206
	皇建 (1) Huangjian (1)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	1210
神宗 (～遵頊 [x ū]) Shenzong (Weiming Zunxu)	光定 (13) Guangding (13)	辛未 _八 <i>xin-wei₈</i>	1211
献宗 (～德旺) Xianzong (Weiming Dewang)	乾定 (3) Qianding (3)	甲申 _{十二} <i>jia-shen₁₂</i>	1224
末帝 (～ [xiàn]) Modi (Weiming Xian)	宝义 (1) Baoyi (1)	丁亥 <i>ding-hai</i>	1227

金 Jin Dynasty

[完颜氏 Wanyan Family] (1115–1234)

太祖 Emperor Taizu (完颜旻 [mín], 本名阿骨打 Wanyan Min, originally named Wanyan Akutta)	收国 Shouguo (2)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	1115
	天辅 Tianfu (7)	丁酉 <i>ding-you</i>	1117
太宗 Emperor Taizong (～晟 [shèng] Wanyan Sheng)	天会 Tianhui (15)	癸卯 _九 <i>gui-mao₉</i>	1123
熙宗 Emperor Xizong (～亶 [dǎn] Wanyan Dan)	天会 Tianhui*	乙卯 _一 <i>yi-mao₁</i>	1135
	天眷 Tianjuan (3)	戊午 <i>wu-wu</i>	1138
	皇统 Huangtong (9)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	1141
海陵王 King Hailing (～亮 Wanyan Liang)	天德 Tiande (5)	己巳 _{十二} <i>ji-si₁₂</i>	1149
	贞元 Zhenyuan (4)	癸酉 _三 <i>gui-you₃</i>	1153
	正隆 Zhenglong (6)	丙子 _二 <i>bing-zi₂</i>	1156
世宗 Emperor Shizong (～雍 Wanyan Yong)	大定 Dading (29)	辛巳 _十 <i>xin-si₁₀</i>	1161
章宗 Emperor Zhangzong (～璟 [jǐng] Wanyan Jing)	明昌 Mingchang (7)	庚戌 <i>geng-xu</i>	1190
	承安 Cheng'an (5)	丙辰 _{十一} <i>bing-chen₁₁</i>	1196
	泰和 Taihe (8)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	1201
卫绍王 King Weishao (～永济 Wanyan Yongji)	大安 Da'an (3)	己巳 <i>ji-si</i>	1209
	崇庆 Chongqing (2)	壬申 <i>ren-shen</i>	1212
	至宁 Zhining (1)	癸酉 _五 <i>gui-you₅</i>	1213
宣宗 Emperor Xuanzong (～珣 [xún] Wanyan Xun)	贞祐 Zhenyou (5)	癸酉 _九 <i>gui-you₉</i>	1213
	兴定 Xingding (6)	丁丑 _九 <i>ding-chou₉</i>	1217
	元光 Yuanguang (2)	壬午 _八 <i>ren-wu₈</i>	1222
哀宗 Emperor Aizong (～守绪 Wanyan Shouxu)	正大 Zhengda (9)	甲申 <i>jia-shen</i>	1224
	开兴 Kaixing (1)	壬辰 _一 <i>ren-chen₁</i>	1232
	天兴 Tianxing (3)	壬辰 _四 <i>ren-chen₄</i>	1232

*熙宗即位未改元。Emperor Xizong did not change the reign title when he ascended the throne.

元 **Yuan Dynasty**[孛儿只斤氏 **Borzigin Family**] (1206–1368)

蒙古孛儿只斤·铁木真于 1206 年建国。1271 年忽必烈定国号为元, 1279 年灭南宋。Borzigin Temuzin, a Mongol general, founded a kingdom in 1206. Kublai Khan renamed the kingdom Yuan in 1271, and overthrew the Southern Song Dynasty in 1279.

太祖 Emperor Taizu (孛儿只斤·铁木真 Borzigin Temuzin) (成吉思汗 Genghis Khan)	— (22)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	1206
拖雷 Toloi (监国 regent)	— (1)	戊子 <i>wu-zi</i>	1228
太宗 Emperor Taizong (~ 窝阔台 Borzigin Ugedai)	— (13)	己丑 <i>ji-chou</i>	1229
乃马真后 Empress Naimazin (称制 claiming the throne)	— (5)	壬寅 <i>ren-yin</i>	1242
定宗 Emperor Dingzong (~ 贵由 Borzigin Guyug)	— (3)	丙午 _七 <i>bing-wu₇</i>	1246
海迷失后 Empress Haimig (称制 claiming the throne)	— (3)	己酉 _三 <i>ji-you₃</i>	1249
宪宗 Emperor Xianzong (~ 蒙哥 Borzigin Monghe)	— (9)	辛亥 _六 <i>xin-hai₆</i>	1251
世祖 Emperor Shizu (~ 忽必烈 Borzigin Kublai)	中统 Zhongtong (5)	庚申 _五 <i>geng-shen₅</i>	1260
	至元 Zhiyuan (31)	甲子 _八 <i>jia-zi₈</i>	1264
成宗 Emperor Chengzong (~ 铁穆耳 Borzigin Temur)	元贞 Yuanzhen (3)	乙未 <i>yi-wei</i>	1295
	大德 Dade (11)	丁酉 _二 <i>ding-you₂</i>	1297
武宗 Emperor Wuzong (~ 海山 Borzigin Haisan)	至大 Zhida (4)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1308

仁宗 Emperor Renzong (～爱育黎拔力八达 Borzigin Ayurbalbad)	皇庆 Huangqing (2)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	1312
	延祐 Yanyou (7)	甲寅 <i>jia-yin</i>	1314
英宗 Emperor Yingzong (～硕 [shuò] 德八剌 Borzigin Sidibala)	至治 Zhizhi (3)	辛酉 <i>xin-you</i>	1321
泰定帝 Emperor Taiding (～也孙铁木儿 Borzigin Yisuntumur)	泰定 Taiding (5)	甲子 <i>jia-zi</i>	1324
	致和 Zhihe (1)	戊辰 _二 <i>wu-chen₂</i>	1328
天顺帝 Emperor Tianshun (～阿速吉八 Borzigin Asazibao)	天顺 Tianshun (1)	戊辰 _九 <i>wu-chen₉</i>	1328
文宗 Emperor Wenzong (～图贴睦尔 Borzigin Tubtemur)	天历 Tianli (3)	戊辰 _九 <i>wu-chen₉</i>	1328
		己巳 <i>ji-si</i>	1329
明宗 Emperor Mingzong (～和世 [là] Borzigin Husle) *	至顺 Zhishun (4)	庚午 _五 <i>geng-wu₅</i>	1330
宁宗 Emperor Ningzong (～懿 [yi] 璘 [lín] 质班 Borzigin Irincinbala)	至顺 Zhishun	壬申 _十 <i>ren-shen₁₀</i>	1332
顺帝 Emperor Shun (～妥懽帖睦尔 Borzigin Togugantemur)	至顺 Zhishun	癸酉 _六 <i>gui-you₆</i>	1333
	元统 Yuantong (3)	癸酉 _十 <i>gui-you₁₀</i>	1333
	(后 later) 至元 Zhiyuan (6)	乙亥 _{十一} <i>yi-hai₁₁</i>	1335
	至正 Zhizheng (28)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	1341

*明宗于己巳 (1329) 正月即位, 以文宗为皇太子。八月明宗暴死, 文宗复位。 Emperor Mingzong ascended the throne in the 1st month of the year *ji-si* (1329) and made Wenzong the crown prince. Emperor Mingzong died a sudden death in the 8th month of that year, upon which Wenzong resumed the throne.

明 Ming Dynasty (1368–1644)

太祖 Emperor Taizu (朱元璋 Zhu Yuanzhang)	洪武 Hongwu (31)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1368
惠帝 Emperor Hui (～允炆 [wén] Zhu Yunwen)	建文 Jianwen (4)*	己卯 <i>ji-mao</i>	1399
成祖 Emperor Chengzu (～棣 [dì] Zhu Di)	永乐 Yongle (22)	癸未 <i>gui-wei</i>	1403
仁宗 Emperor Renzong (～高炽 [chì] Zhu Gaochi)	洪熙 Hongxi (1)	乙巳 <i>yi-si</i>	1425
宣宗 Emperor Xuanzong (～瞻 [zhān] 基 Zhu Zhanji)	宣德 Xuande (10)	丙午 <i>bing-wu</i>	1426
英宗 Emperor Yingzong (～祁镇 Zhu Qizhen)	正统 Zhengtong (14)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	1436
代宗 Emperor Daizong (～祁钰 [yù] Zhu Qiyu) (景帝 also called Emperor Jing)	景泰 Jingtai (8)	庚午 <i>geng-wu</i>	1450
英宗 Emperor Yingzong (～祁镇 Zhu Qizhen)	天顺 Tianshun (8)	丁丑 <i>ding-chou₁</i>	1457
宪宗 Emperor Xianzong (～见深 Zhu Jianshen)	成化 Chenghua (23)	乙酉 <i>yi-you</i>	1465
孝宗 Emperor Xiaozong (～祐橈 [chēng] Zhu Youcheng)	弘治 Hongzhi (18)	戊申 <i>wu-shen</i>	1488
武宗 Emperor Wuzong (～厚照 Zhu Houzhao)	正德 Zhengde (16)	丙寅 <i>bing-yin</i>	1506
世宗 Emperor Shizong (～厚熹 [cōng] Zhu Houcong)	嘉靖 Jiajing (45)	壬午 <i>ren-wu</i>	1522

穆宗 Emperor Muzong (～载屋 [hòu] Zhu Zaihou)	隆庆 Longqing (6)	丁卯 <i>dīng-mao</i>	1567
神宗 Emperor Shenzong (～翊 [yì] 钧 Zhu Yijun)	万历 Wanli (48)	癸酉 <i>guī-you</i>	1573
光宗 Emperor Guangzong (～常洛 Zhu Changluo)	泰昌 Taichang (1)	庚申 _八 <i>gēng-shēn₈</i>	1620
熹 [xī] 宗 Emperor Xizong (～由校 Zhu Youjiao)	天启 Tianqi (7)	辛酉 <i>xīn-you</i>	1621
思宗 Emperor Sizong (～由检 Zhu Youjian)	崇祯 Chongzhen (17)	戊辰 <i>wu-chen</i>	1628

*建文四年时成祖废除建文年号, 改为洪武三十五年。In the 4th year of the Jianwen reign, Emperor Chengzu abolished the reign title of Jianwen and restored the reign title of Hongwu, counting that year as the 35th year of the Hongwu reign.

清 Qing Dynasty

[爱新觉罗氏 Aisin-Gioro Family] (1616–1911)

清建国于 1616 年, 初称后金, 1636 年始改国号为清, 1644 年入关。The Qing Dynasty was known as Later Jin when it was first established in 1616, and the name Qing was not adopted until 1636. The Qing army fought its way across Shanhai Pass in 1644, thereby extending its rule south of the Great Wall.

太祖 Emperor Taizu (爱新觉罗·努尔哈赤 Aisin-Gioro Nurhachi)	天命 Tianming (11)	丙辰 <i>bīng-chen</i>	1616
太宗 Emperor Taizong (～皇太极 Aisin-Gioro Huangtaiji)	天聪 Tiancong (10)	丁卯 <i>dīng-mao</i>	1627
	崇德 Chongde (8)	丙子 _四 <i>bīng-zǐ₄</i>	1636
世祖 Emperor Shizu (～福临 Aisin-Gioro Fulin)	顺治 Shunzhi (18)	甲申 <i>jiā-shēn</i>	1644
圣祖 Emperor Shengzu (～玄烨 [yè] Aisin-Gioro Xuanye)	康熙 Kangxi (61)	壬寅 <i>rén-yīn</i>	1662

世宗 Emperor Shizong (~胤 [yìn] 禩 [zhēn] Aisin-Gioro Yinzhen)	雍正 Yongzheng (13)	癸卯 <i>gui-mao</i>	1723
高宗 Emperor Gaozong (~弘历 Aisin-Gioro Hongli)	乾隆 Qianlong (60)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	1736
仁宗 Emperor Renzong (~颙 琰 [yǎn] Aisin-Gioro Yongyan)	嘉庆 Jiaqing (25)	丙辰 <i>bing-chen</i>	1796
宣宗 Emperor Xuanzong (~旻 宁 Aisin-Gioro Minning)	道光 Daoguang (30)	辛巳 <i>xin-si</i>	1821
文宗 Emperor Wenzong (~奕 訢 [zhǔ] Aisin-Gioro Yizhu)	咸丰 Xianfeng (11)	辛亥 <i>xin-hai</i>	1851
穆宗 Emperor Muzong (~载淳 Aisin-Gioro Zaichun)	同治 Tongzhi (13)	壬戌 <i>ren-xu</i>	1862
德宗 Emperor Dezong (~载湉 Aisin-Gioro Zaitian)	光绪 Guangxu (34)	乙亥 <i>yi-hai</i>	1875
~溥 [pǔ] 仪 Aisin-Gioro Puyi	宣统 Xuantong (3)	己酉 <i>ji-you</i>	1909

中华民国 Republic of China (1912–1949)

中华民国 Republic of China (38)	壬子 <i>ren-zi</i>	1912
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中华人民共和国 1949 年 10 月 1 日成立

Founding of the People's Republic of China on October 1, 1949

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